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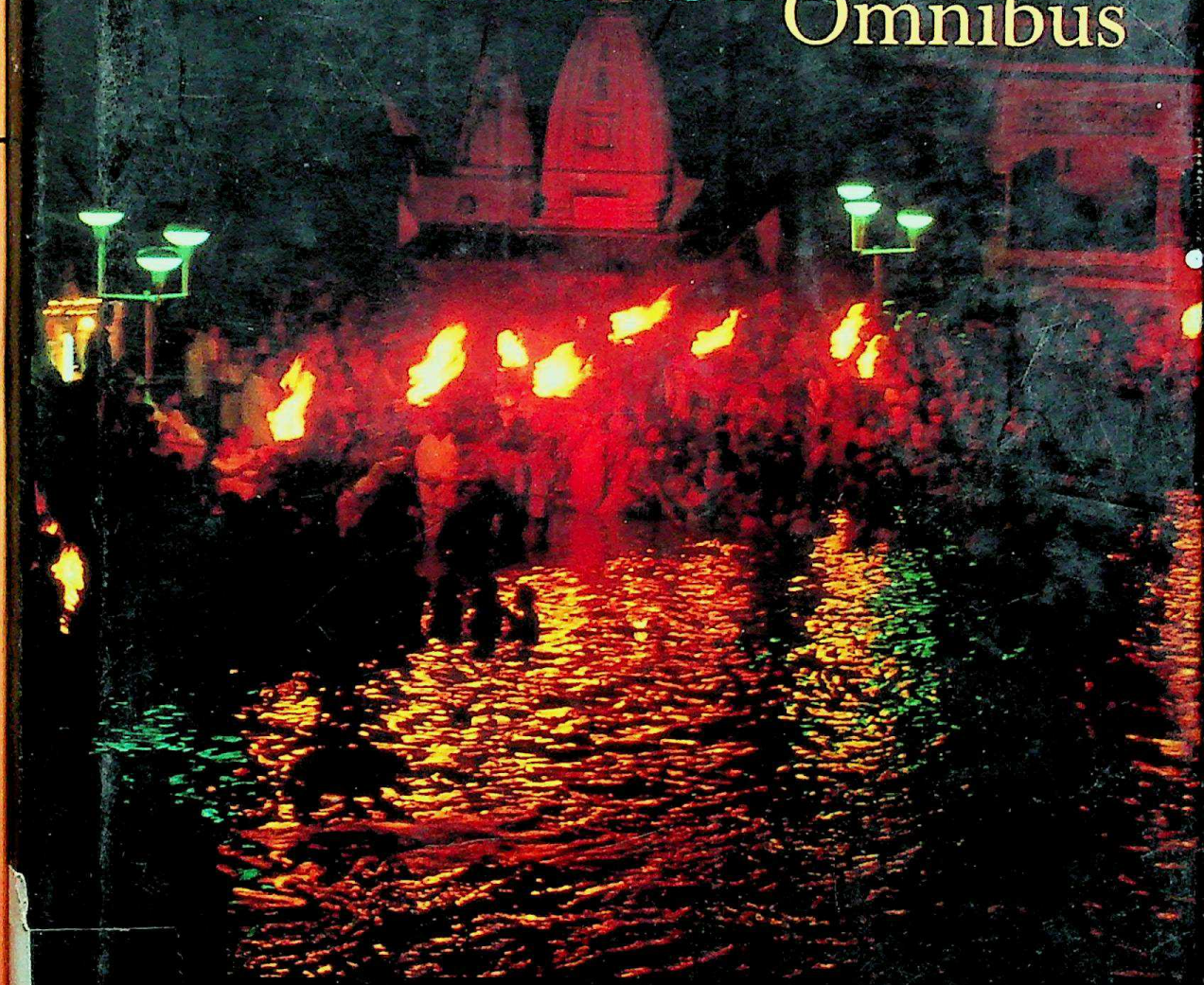
The HINDUISM Omnibus



Nirad C. Chaudhuri Madeleine Biardeau

D. F. Pocock T. N. Madan

THE HINDUISM OMNIBUS

This collection of four highly acclaimed works explores the myriad dimensions of the world religion that is Hinduism. Although South Asia is the original homeland of Hinduism, its adherents, counted in millions, are today found in many parts of the world. For centuries, the religion has attracted the attention of scholars both at home in South Asia and abroad and has inspired a wide spectrum of approaches. The four books brought together in this omnibus consider Hinduism from various angles: as a personal experience, as a rich textual tradition, and as a body of belief and practice.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* is a wholly original exposition of Hinduism, focusing on Hindu religious psychology and behaviour. Rejecting familiar assumptions about early Hinduism, Chaudhuri examines temple and image worship, as well as the three major cults of Shiva, Krishna, and the Mother Goddess.

Madeleine Biardeau's *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization* offers interpretations of the epics, traditional customs, and social norms. Using evidence from archaeological monuments and literary texts, the book brings to light the underlying unity beneath the bewildering diversity of this living tradition.

Mind, Body and Wealth: Belief and Practice in an Indian Village by D. F. Pocock examines Hinduism as a body of belief and practice. Based on fieldwork in Gujarat, the study is distinguished by an eye for detail and a capacity for empathy, as well as by literary felicity.

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Madeleine Biardeau

MIND, BODY AND WEALTH
A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village
D. F. Pocock

NON-RENUNCIATION
Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture
T. N. Madan

with an Introduction by T. N. Madan

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Publisher's Note

The Oxford University Press is pleased to offer readers an omnibus on Hinduism comprising four highly acclaimed works on the subject, namely Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (1979), Madeleine Biardeau's *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization* (1989), D. F. Pocock's *Mind, Body and Wealth: Belief and Practice in an Indian Village* (1973), and T. N. Madan's *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (1987).

Although South Asian countries are the original homelands of Hinduism, its adherents, counted in millions, are today found in many countries of the world. It is a world religion, and, among such religions, it is the oldest, not in its present form, but as a contemporary faith that includes key ideas, beliefs, and practices which were originally formulated three thousand or more years ago, and have since been continuously altered and elaborated.

With an eventful history, Hinduism has shown a striking capacity for absorbing elements from other religious traditions and also innovating significantly from within. It is a tradition that has sprouted new gods, goddesses, and cults even in the twentieth century.

Hinduism has for centuries attracted the attention of scholars at home in South Asia and from abroad. One of the finest studies marked by scholarship and acute personal inquiry and observation is al-Biruni's classic work *Tarikh-ul Hind*, composed at the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era. In our times, scholarly studies reflecting diverse approaches to the study of Hinduism have contributed to the broadening as well as deepening of our knowledge and understanding of the subject.

Some of these approaches are represented in the present volume. The understanding of a religious tradition in terms of the personal experience of those who profess it, and reflect on it, is invaluable in itself, and as a first-order interpretation that may be drawn upon by others, whether insiders

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or outsiders. Among twentieth-century Indian intellectuals, Nirad C. Chaudhuri's has been a unique and original voice. An extraordinary storehouse of knowledge of his own and other religious traditions, his interpretations are marked by daring and insight. And he is a master of English prose. His *Hinduism* is the first of the four works presented here.

Madeleine Biardeau is a Sanskritist *par excellence*, who has not, however, kept herself confined to the library or to Indology. She is an outstanding authority on the textual tradition of Hinduism, and has enriched her understanding of India by personal observation and intimate familiarity with anthropological studies. Her *Hinduism*, originally written in French, is the second volume included in the *Omnibus*.

As for anthropological studies proper of Hinduism as a body of belief and practice, D. F. Pocock's *Mind, Body and Wealth*, the third book, is based on fieldwork in Gujarat and is distinguished by an eye for detail and a capacity for empathy, and by literary felicity. It is not inaccessible to the outsider as long as he or she is able to establish a dialogue, as it were, between the view from within and the view from without. Pocock does this very well.

The last of the four works brought together in this volume is T. N. Madan's *Non-Renunciation*. Like Nirad C. Chaudhuri, he is an insider to the cultural tradition he describes; he is also an anthropologist by training, however, and attempts to look at it with an outsider's curiosity. He also draws upon textual studies of various kinds. His is an eclectic approach and holistic as he does not present religion as a thing apart from secular life.

The volume opens with an introductory essay written specially for it by T. N. Madan. The epilogue in his *Non-Renunciation*, 'The Quest for Hinduism' (referred to on pages 15–16 of his book), has therefore not been included here with his consent. The Press acknowledges his help and advice in the assembling of the *Omnibus*.

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HINDUISM
An Introductory Essay

T. N. Madan

> One and indivisible at the root, it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the seasons affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. Hinduism is like the Ganges, pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way.
>
> Mahatma Gandhi

HINDUISM: THE TRADITION AND THE WORD

To begin this essay, I would like to address a question that has been of late much debated in the contemporary discourse on Hinduism: namely, is there such a *thing*, or 'social fact', as all-India Hinduism, encompassing local or regional communities of faith among the people generally called the Hindus? Or, is Hinduism only a *word*, without an empirical referent, invented by nineteenth-century Christian missionaries, Orientalists, administrators, and the like, which has erroneously led to the postulation of a subcontinental community of faith and practice where there are only communities, castes, and sects?

There is a widely held view among educated Indians that, *traditionally*, Hindus have not been particularly self-conscious about religion as an isolable component or aspect of their world-view and their way of life. One of the most succinct statements of this position came from the pen of Bankimchandra Chatterji, one of the tallest Indian intellectuals of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

> With other peoples, religion is only a part of life; there are things religious and things

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lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life is religion.... To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and his temporal life, are incapable of being so distinguished. They form one compact and harmonious whole, to separate which into component parts is to break the entire fabric (quoted in Chaudhuri 1979: 11–12).

The critics of this view assert that it is essentially Brahmanical, but they do not present credible evidence of a non-upper-caste perspective that clearly demarcates the religious domain from the secular. However, more than a hundred years have passed since Chatterji wrote the above; processes of secularization have gradually expanded the scope of the purely secular domain in contemporary India as everywhere else, but religion is far from being wholly driven into the privacy of individual lives. Chatterji's perception remains largely valid even today for most of the people of this country.

Moreover and interestingly, it offers a definition of religion that is broad enough to have cross-cultural applicability: religion comprises beliefs and practices concerning, first, one's relations to the supernatural or the sacred, and, concomitantly, one's relations to fellow human beings informed by the former. To regard the temporal domain as encompassed by the spiritual is to have a religious world-view. This is a presupposition rather than an afterthought that must therefore always be spelled out. When the ancient Brahmanical text *Vishnu Purana* (*ca.* late third century AD) describes Indians as the children of the land called Bharat, which is then described geographically as the country lying to the north of the ocean and south of the snow-clad mountains, it should be remembered that in the traditional world-view the oceans and the mountains are sacred spaces with their presiding divinities; indeed they are themselves divinities.

The Persians (in about the middle of the sixth century BC) and the Greeks (from the early fourth century BC) described these peoples in relation to the westernmost of the many great rivers of their land, which was of course the one that they encountered first—namely the river called Sindhu in Sanskrit. Sindhu became 'Hindu' in Persian and 'Indos' in Greek, and the terms were, it appears, used for both the land and the peoples under reference. Many hundred years later, early in the eighth century, the eastward push of the Umayyad caliphate, brought Arabs as conquerors into the Hindu kingdom lying astride and above the Indus delta: the land was called Sindh. In the years that followed, the vast country that lay beyond Sindh in northern India was by extension called al-Hind, and the peoples thereof came to be known as al-Hindi. In course of time a distinction came to be made between the 'Hindi', an ethno-geographical category, and the 'Hindu', followers of a particular religion. It is noteworthy that this distinction was not merely a localized usage, but known widely, even in southern India,

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where it was employed, for instance, in a mid-fourteenth century Persian work, Abd al-Malik Isami's *Futuhus Salatin*, a chronicle of the victories of the sultans (see Lorenzen 1999: 653).

The term 'Hindu', it appears, underwent further elaboration following the spread of Islam in India, and came to be used to refer to those Indians who remained outside the Islamic fold (*umma*). This does not imply that they were all considered the followers of one religion. The existence of a widespread major faith was, however, recognized. For this we have the written testimony of the great Persian traveller, linguist, and ethnographer, al-Biruni. He came to India with Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, spent about ten years here, and composed his *magnum opus*, *Tarikh-ul Hind* (the annals of India), around 1030 AD. After introductory observations, al-Biruni begins his narrative with the *Hindu* conception of God, reflecting presumably his own Islamic grammar of values, but perhaps also the cognitive priorities of the peoples of India. He proceeds to consider (although not in the same order as below) *Hindu* theology and mythology (Prajapati, Rudra, Vishnu), metaphysics (soul, causation, metempsychosis, liberation), religious practices (fasting, idol worship, pilgrimages), sacred texts (vedas, puranas), secular literature (grammar, arithmetic, astronomy), social organization (*varnas* and their sub-categories), civil and religious laws, marriage customs, and so on (see Embree 1971). In one comprehensive and holistic narrative, he presented a picture of India as a variegated yet unified cultural space of the Hindus in which the relations between the human and supernatural spheres and among human beings themselves were intertwined. This idea of India was neither an outsider's invention nor was it new.

Three hundred years before al-Biruni, Shankara (788–820 AD), a south Indian Brahman thinker-actor, had travelled all over India to propagate his monist philosophy and his thoughts on the true nature of reality. India—from Shringeri in the south to Kashmir in the north, and from Puri in the east to Dwarka in the west—was the arena of his mission of religious unification. His followers called his travels the *digvijay* (victory over the four quarters). Existent geographical unity and putative cultural uniformity were apparently considered potentially coterminous. Religious differences also were known from early on, but the Brahmans regarded the Jainas, the Bauddhas and other dissenters as heretics, whom they sought to overcome, not physically but by argument. In the process concessions were made, and ideas flowed both ways between antagonists. Shankara who had vigorously opposed the Bauddhas came himself to be called a crypto-Buddhist (*prachchhanna bauddha*) by his critics.

Following the evolution of Islam as a major religion of India, its scholars too were engaged by Brahmans, and engaged them in turn, on the nature

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and scope of true religious belief and practice. A fictionalized account of such a dialogue (*samvad*) was presented by Eknath, a Maharashtrian *sant* (seeker of truth) of the sixteenth century (see Zelliot 2003: 64–82). The two protagonists are identified as a Hindu and a Turk; the latter is also identified as a Mussulman. Mutual hostility is highlighted to bring out the triviality of religious differences and to emphasize the unity of true faith and the importance of divine grace. Inter-religious conflicts did not, however, cease because some religious teachers characterized them as erroneous. Indeed the cause of religion—its protection or propagation—was often invoked. The Maratha chieftan Shivaji (1827–80) spoke of his sacrifices for the sake of 'Hindu dharma'. David Lorenzen sums up the outcome of Hindu-Muslim encounters by pointing out that during the centuries of Muslim rule beginning with the sultans in the early thirteenth century, 'the Hindus developed a consciousness of a shared religious identity based on the family resemblance among the variegated beliefs and practices' cutting across the boundaries of 'sect, caste, chosen deity or theological creed' (1999: 655).

The recognition of differences between Hindus and Muslims on religious grounds by both sides from the eleventh century onward (see Kellock 1993) was not all that was happening. Intercultural symbiosis existed alongside the differences. Thus, the cross-fertilization of ideas and practices between Muslim Sufis and Hindu *bhaktas* (of all castes, high and low), found in all parts of the country, produced the acclaimed Sant tradition and religious syncretism of the medieval times (see Schomer and McLeod 1987). This ultimately found a royal patron in the emperor Akbar in the late sixteenth century, with his ideal of *sulh-i kul* (good will towards one-and-all, or total peace). It is important to recognize that the various regional bhakti traditions, particularly those called *saguna*, that is, centred around a chosen, personal god or goddess, drew upon the common source of puranic legends as well as upon local creeds and cults. These traditions were united by their devotional goals and practices on more than a local or regional basis. Pilgrimages across the length and breadth of the country, and not by Brahmans alone, contributed to the nourishing of an all-India religious tradition of the Hindus.

In view of the above necessarily very brief recapitulation of certain developments in India's religious history, it is quite curious that Hinduism is said to be a kind of mirage—it seems to be there but is not—a result of the myopic view of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century westerners. They of course coined the term 'Hinduism' (or 'Hindooism') and other equivalents, such as 'Hinduismus', 'hindouisme', and 'induismo'. By the early nineteenth century educated Indians also had begun to use the English term: Rammohun Roy did so in 1816. Towards the end of the century, it is rightly

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pointed out, Hinduism became an important element in the construction of national unity in the setting of colonial subjugation. (More about this below.) That does not, however, justify the conclusion that the conception of a common, although internally diversified, India-wide Hindu religious tradition was until then altogether absent—that it is a modern construction. 'What has survived over the centuries', it is maintained, 'is not a single monolithic religion but a diversity of religious sects which *we today have put together under a uniform name*' (Thapar 1997: 56, emphasis added). Hinduism is thus presented as at best a convenient but loose label, and at worst a modern hegemonic concept of cultural and ultimately political domination.

The dangers of present-day Hindu right-wing intolerance of religious and cultural pluralism should of course not be minimized, but, fearful of it, the evidence about the evolution of Hinduism should also not be misread. In Lorenzen's summing up, this evidence leads to the following conclusion:

> From the point of view of a modern observer, one can see the family resemblance taking a recognizably Hindu shape in the early Puranas, roughly around the period 300–600 [AD]. Although the religion of these Puranas displays many continuities with the earlier Vedic religion, the principal features and emphases—particularly its greatly expanded mythology of the gods Vishnu, Siva and Devi—do, I think, justify marking this religion off as something new, as the beginning of medieval and modern Hinduism. This Hinduism was not invented by anyone, European or Indian (1999: 555).

The point of all this is that, compared to revealed religions, Hinduism is more unremittingly characterized by a processual character than any one of them. At the macro-level it has no founder, church, or fundamentals; the vedas are, however, considered revealed (although not in the same sense as the Quran, for instance; the emphasis is upon the recovery of eternal truths by the sages). It may be argued that this is the tradition of the Brahmans, and ignores the traditions of other so-called Hindu communities. There is ample evidence available to us today of the processes of 'parochialization' (not a happy term) or 'Sanskritization'—that is the spread of Brahmanical ideas and rituals among other communities through propagation and imitation—and 'universalization', or the absorption of elements of folk traditions into the Brahmanical stream. This cultural give-and-take began as early as the vedic times, and has remained a live dynamic ever since (see Marriott 1955, Chakrabarti 2001, Srinivas 2002).

To deny this continuity, and to emphasize the mutually exclusive character of what are actually mutually interacting cultural communities, is to disregard the facts of history and ethnography. Whether to emphasize the all-India, the regional, or the local view is usually a question of an author's purposes and procedures. If one were to focus on what is distinctive about

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the religious tradition of the Pandits of Kashmir, calling them Shaivas or Shaktas may not be precise enough; one may have to call them (or at least some of them) Tripuras (those who emphasize the feminine, Shakti, aspect), or Kulas (those who emphasize the masculine, Shiva, aspect). If one is interested in inquiring into the extent to which the Pandits are not a cultural enclave, but participate in a wider, subcontinental, religious complex, one could call them Smartas (within the pluralist tradition of worship established by Shankara), or, more broadly, upper caste Hindus in terms of the observance of life-cycle rituals. They self-consciously partake of the traditions of what they themselves call Hindu dharma. Besides, from late medieval times onward, the Pandits are referred to as Hindus (*hunud*) in the revenue records. In other words, the trees of ethnographic description have long been a sociological forest.

IS HINDUISM A RELIGION?

There is another question that too has been asked from time to time in the recent past: Is Hinduism a religion? Max Weber was so dazzled by the internal tolerance within the Hindu tradition that he concluded, 'Hinduism is simply not a "religion" in our [western] sense of the word' (1958: 23). Besides internal plurality, there is also the fluid character of this tradition. At a broad level, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued that if one were to 'define' Hinduism, for instance as a religion, it would 'deny the Hindu his right to the freedom and integrity of his faith. What he may do tomorrow no man can say today' (1978: 145). Thinking historically about any religion leads to the same conclusion, namely, abandon the notion of religious entities and adopt the idea of religious tradition.

More specifically, the distinguished Indologist R. N. Dandekar maintains that Hinduism is not a religion because: (i) 'the concept of god is not central to it'; (ii) it does not have a founder or sole prophet; (iii) it has no 'absolutely authoritative scripture'; (iv) it is not characterized by any 'obligatory religious practice' or fundamental 'doctrine' or 'dogma'; and (v) it does not have a 'specific moral code'. 'And yet', he adds, 'Hinduism has persisted through centuries as a distinct religious identity' (1971: 237). What, then, is the denial about? Obviously Dandekar's intellectual doubts are the outcome of comparing Hinduism—about whose existence as an 'entity' (the idea Smith rejects) he seems sure (as an insider?)—with the Abrahamic religions at too low or concrete a level. When Durkheim decided nearly a hundred years ago, on the basis of his reading of the available evidence, that Buddhism and Jainism lacked the notion of the 'divine', and that even Brahmanical speculation had moved in a more abstract direction, he came

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up with the even more abstract notion of the 'sacred' as the defining characteristic of religious belief anywhere (see Durkheim 1995: 28–31, 34–38, 58–61 et passim). The generalizing sociological approach is, of course, not an easy one for the historian.

Another argument, derived from the allegedly nominalistic character of Hinduism (discussed above), is that Hinduism is not a religion, but a 'family' or 'federation' of religions—that the constituent religions (or religious communities, *sampradays*) have founders, essential teachings, sacred books, institutions, etc., while it does not. The absence of essential ideas or dogmas is, I think, overstated. Thus, even a complete but interested outsider like Max Weber noted long ago that 'the *samsara* belief in the transmigration of souls and the related *karman* doctrine of compensation' were 'the truly "dogmatic" doctrines of *all* Hinduism' (1958: 118, emphasis added). As for the undoubted internal diversity, the way to deal with it is, for instance, to consider Hinduism a 'polycentric' religion as Lipner (1996) does. He invokes the image of the banyan tree. Indeed, Gandhi too had done so way back in 1926, when he wrote: 'One and indivisible at the root, it [Hinduism] has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches' (see Bose 1948: 261). It is, of course, a perspective that does not readily appeal to someone brought up in the setting of the Semitic religions, which have also deeply influenced the sociology of religion in the west.

Limitations of space preclude a more detailed examination of the many ways in which the thesis that Hinduism is not a religion has been put forward (see, for example, Balagangadhara 1994, Sontheimer and Kulke 1997), and I do not consider it necessary. The preoccupation with definitions is fine for punditry, but the purpose of the interested educated reader, who is not a specialist, is served quite well if it is emphasized that in employing the notions of 'Hinduism' and 'Hinduism as a religion', one is neither simplifying what is complex, nor essentializing what is processual in character. Complexity and historicity do not, in fact, need to be denied. The Hindu villager, ethnographic studies have shown, has a comprehensive and therefore complex view of the wholeness of life and of the interrelationship of dharma (the transcendental moral order) and karma (human agency) (see Mathur 1965, Pocock 1973, Gold 1988). Moreover, gradual change over the generations in these matters also is acknowledged.

VEDISM TO HINDUISM: A SYNOPTIC VIEW

Let us now take another look at the evolving and internally plural character of the tradition that began with vedic religion and became the Hindu dharma or Hinduism.

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The major source of our knowledge about the religious life of the Aryans—so-called—is the body of sacred literature called the *veda* ('knowledge', 'wisdom'), which is believed to be ever-existent (*sanatana*) and therefore lacking any human author (*apaurusheya*): it stretches over almost a thousand years. The earliest of the vedic texts is the *Rig*, which has been dated no later than 1200 BC (but is perhaps older). Its ten books of hymns in praise of divinities presumably represent ten family traditions among the Brahmans (rituals specialists) and took several centuries to compose. The *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas* extend the scope of the *Rig* into music and ritual respectively. Finally, the *Atharva Veda* is believed to represent the absorption of folk cults into the vedic corpus, resulting in significant changes in it, as the Aryans moved east into the Gangetic valley, and adopted more settled ways. Gradually, vedic divinities lost their supremacy and magical spells and rites became ascendant (see Flood 1996).

The vedas became the basis for an immense textual efflorescence, comprising manuals of ritual performances (*brahmanas*, *aranyakas*), and later discursive speculative treatises (*upanishads*), also called *vedanta*, (the culmination of the veda) (see Olivelle 1998), all of which brings us close to 300 BC. Vedism gradually made way for the emergence of what is generally called Hinduism on a subcontinental scale, which brought more texts on more varied subjects into existence, notably the *grihya sutras*, which are guides to the performance of domestic rituals, and the *dharma sutras* which have social ethics and law as their subject matter. Besides, there are the *shrauta sutras*, which are technical treatises on the correct procedures for the performance of vedic rituals of public significance. The grihya sutras have a regional character: a text followed in one part of the country may be unknown in another, but they have common subject matter.

Later still than the sutras are the *dharma shastras* which continue with the same themes but in much greater detail. The best known of these texts today is the *Manav Dharma Shastra*, attributed to a seer called Manu, and therefore also known as the *Manu Smriti* (see Doniger 1991). It is believed to have been composed between 200 BC and AD 300, which rules out single authorship. What stands out in this and other similar texts is the institutional framework for the conduct of both domestic life and public affairs.

In social life, the key principles of *varna* (social class) and ashrama (stage of life) are laid down for the definition of appropriate rituals and worldly affairs. While universal norms (*sarva sadharna dharma*) are not wholly eliminated, but retained as the foundation of all righteous conduct, it is the varna- and ashrama-specific rules that emerge as preponderant. It is thus that Hinduism has been called the varna-ashrama-dharma, or a context-

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sensitive morality. Not only the householder, but the kings too are bound by their respective duties defined in terms of varna and ashrama (see Lingat 1973). As for those who repudiated such divisions, notably the renouncers (*sannyasis*), even they are guided by their own *yati* dharma.

The speculative or philosophical concerns of the Brahmanical tradition were formulated as different systems of orthodox thought termed *darshana*, or 'visions', or 'views' (in both senses of the word 'view' as something seen and also as a philosophical position) of life based on the veda. Each of these darshanas, six in number, has its own authoritative texts. The thought (or reflections) that follows from each position is not exclusive in the manner of the various guides to ritual performance and social behaviour. Together they constitute what can only be called a complex totality aimed at deliverance from ignorance through true knowledge. The six schools are: (i) Samkhya ('enumeration') which asserts the ontological duality of matter (*prakrti*) and the 'self' (*purusha*); (ii) Yoga ('joining', 'mixing') which constitutes a pair with Samkhya in terms of its metaphysics; (iii) Mimamsa (vedic exegesis) which takes a pluralist view of reality; (iv) Vedanta ('culmination of veda'), grouped with Mimamsa, which denies the reality of the many; (v) Nyaya (logic); and (vi) Vaisheshika (dialectics), considered a pair, which deal with logical, ontological and dialectical issues within an empiricist, pluralist (more precisely atomist), framework (see Hiriyana 1993). The primacy which the monism of Vedanta has enjoyed in contemporary literature on India does little justice to the internal diversities of Brahmanical thought even when dealing with the same issues, or with its method of dealing with them to preclude mutual incomprehensibility.

The foregoing traditions of scripture, metaphysics, and social organization that are the background to Hinduism, and indeed partly constitute it, are characteristic of Brahmanical orthodoxy. This orthodoxy has not remained unchallenged. The challenges came from within long before any major external threat materialized. The followers of public vedic ritual, called the Shrautas (from *shruti*, 'revelation'), first yielded space to those who gave precedence to domestic rituals, whether the Smartas (followers of the smritis or dharma shastras) or the Pauranikas (those who organize their religious life on the basis of the puranas, which are legendary accounts of the actions of gods, goddesses and other supernatural beings as well as human beings like kings and ascetics). The latter two categories of Hinduism remain within the vedic fold.

It is the *tantras*, texts that are claimed by their followers, the Tantrikas, to be revealed that are non-vedic. Traced to the folk cults of Assam and Bengal, the eastern frontier of vedic (Aryan) northern India, Tantrism is characterized by enormous internal diversity including within its fold magical fertility

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rites as well as arcane metaphysics. The human body is the key site of Tantrik practice; it reveals considerable variety, but is generally characterized by secret rituals, performed often at special sites, such as cremation grounds, and frequently at night.

Two other important bodies of sacred texts, namely the epics of Mahabharata (*ca.* 400 BC–AD 400) and Ramayana (*ca.* AD 200), and the *puranas* ('legendary texts'), also fall into the category of the smriti. They mark the transformation of the vedic Brahmanical religion into Hinduism. Shiva and Vishnu, somewhat vague figures in the vedic pantheon, now emerge as the supreme gods, but not always at peace with each other. Moreover, the notion of incarnation (*avatar*) is formulated within the Vaishnava tradition, Krishna (of the *Bhagvata Purana*) and Rama (of the *Ramayana*) being the most notable among the nine or ten avatars generally recognized. The puranas describe in great detail the deeds of the Hindu trinity (Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer) and other mythological personages. They were composed between the sixth and sixteenth centuries (see Dimmit and van Buitenen 1978).

While the worship of Vishnu is combined in the smarta-pauranika traditions with that of Shiva, Shakti or Devi, Surya (the sun god), and Ganapati (the lord of auspiciousness), in some parts of the country, mutually exclusive and often hostile sects have emerged centred on the cults of the first two gods. These five deities together represent a syncretic movement in Hinduism, dating back to the ninth century, which sought to overcome sectarian and other divisions within Hinduism. Surya and also Vishnu and Shiva are of vedic origin; and Shakti represents the folk religious cults (see Bhattacharji 1988).

From as early as the fifth century, the Vaishnavas were divided into the sects of Pancharatras and Vaikhanasas. Similarly, the Pashupata, Kapalika and Kalamukha sects were prominent among the Shaivas (see Bhattacharji 1988, Lorenzen 1972). Starting in the seventh century, the Vaishnavas and the Shaivas began to generate distinctive liturgical texts called the *samhitas* and *agamas* respectively. Each sect claimed the supremacy of its own deity. In the development of these theistic traditions, from around the closing centuries of the last millennium BC, a number of elements from various sources, including the high Sanskritic and folk religious traditions, fused. Personal devotion (*bhakti*) to one's chosen deity (*ishta*), whether Vishnu in his various incarnations including most notably those of Rama and Krishna-Vasudeva, or Shiva, is a striking characteristic of these cults; it originated in the south and then spread to the north. This devotionalism found expression in emotionally surcharged poetry particularly among the Vaishnavas from the sixth century onward, and later also among the Shaivites, though

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the latter's devotion tended to be more austere (see Ramanujan 1973 and 1981).

Associated with these both is a third tradition, namely the worship of the great goddess, Devi, which emerged virtually independently as the Shakta (from *shakti*, 'power') tradition. Here also the roots go far back in time, perhaps to the Harappan culture, and later developments entail the amalgamation of puranic, tantrik and folk goddesses and ideas. As Lakshmi, the divine consort of Vishnu, the great goddess is presented as a benign bearer of auspiciousness; as Uma-Parvati, she is the divine consort of Shiva, mother of the universe; and as Durga or Kali, the highest manifestation of divine power, she is the fearsome destroyer of evil and greater than all the male gods through the pooling of whose powers she comes into being. At the village level she appears as the goddess who brings and removes illness and misfortune, such as Shitala, the goddess whose visitations were held responsible for small pox (see Hawley and Wulff 1996).

The Hindu religious tradition, we have seen, is characterized by strong pluralistic tendencies emanating from various sources and inspirations. Syncretistic tendencies too have been quite strong. Hinduism has tended to absorb non-Hindu religious ideas and practices also, including in medieval times elements of Sufi Islam. It has dealt with internal dissent through accommodation, sometimes carried to the furthest extremes. Occasionally, this strategy has failed and, as mentioned above, resulted in breakaway sects that in course of time grew into independent religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism, adding a new dimension to the religious plurality of India.

The textual tradition summarized above has been called the Great Tradition of Hinduism by anthropologists and other scholars. As such, it has been contrasted with the Little Traditions or the oral folk traditions. The contrast is analytical rather than a demarcation on the ground, as it were. In real life, as already stated above, there always have been significant cultural exchanges, and these are well documented in the scholarly literature. One of the most recent illustrations of this merger is found in the spoken autobiography of Viramma, a low caste (Dalit) woman of a village in Tamil Nadu (see Viramma et al 2000). It is a story of extreme deprivation and hardship. Viramma's attitude to life could be described as fortitude born of folk wisdom or, perhaps, simply as rustic fatalism. She seeks to make her condition and that of her people bearable by invoking a handful of ideas, some of which are peculiar to the folk tradition, but there are others, too, like dharma and *kaliyuga* (the dark age) that are Brahmanical. Further elaboration of this cultural phenomenon and the processes associated with it is not possible here for want of space.

The same constraint precludes a discussion of the Hindu-Muslim interface

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and the making of composite religious cultures in medieval India beyond what has been briefly mentioned above. Such syncretism bore witness to the vitality of the religious life of the times. It was the *nirguna* bhakti (based on the notion of an impersonal godhead) of exemplars like Kabir (d.1518), who considered himself neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, that contributed to the syncretistic innovations. The *saguna* bhakti of saints such as Mirabai (d.1547) and Tulsidas (d.1623) was within the all-India tradition of Vaishnava theism. Later developments within the Hindu tradition were a result of the impact of evangelical Christianity upon it from the middle of the sixteenth century onward, and it is to these that I now turn.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: RELIGIOUS REFORM AND REVIVALISM

Christianity is believed to have been brought to India by the apostle Thomas. It is but a fact that wherever Christians have been, they have usually made converts. It is only after the establishment of the Roman Catholic church in Goa in the middle of the sixteenth century that proselytization became a significant force in the socio-religious life of India. Protestant missionaries arrived on the east coast early in the eighteenth century. A hundred years later, the British Parliament decided to allow the Anglican ministers of the East India Company to engage in missionary work. Some of the early preachers may have been cautious, but success led to stridency in the condemnation of Hindu religious beliefs and practices. The Abbé J. A. Dubois, who lived in south India in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and was by no means a totally hostile observer, hoped that 'a faithful picture of the wickedness and incongruities of polytheism and idolatory would by its ugliness help greatly to set off the beauties and perfections of Christianity' (1906: 9).

Christian missionaries were not the only westerners writing about India; administrative officers of the Company did so too and very much in the same vein. A contrary voice, however, more in praise of ancient Indian intellectual and literary achievements than of contemporary Hinduism, was that of the Indologists, such as William Jones, who translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* into English (published in 1789), and Max Mueller, who did likewise with the *Rig Veda* (published in 1849). But even Max Mueller believed that degradation and hideousness had assailed contemporary Hinduism, and that Brahmanism had ceased to live more than a thousand years ago. The impact of Christianity and of the writings of the Indologists produced acute tensions in the minds of sensitive Indians. As often happens in such situations, reformist and revivalist movements took birth, constituting

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the two faces of the Hindu renaissance—so-called—in the nineteenth century.

An exceptionally gifted Bengali gentleman, Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) resigned a senior position at the East India Company to espouse the cause of social and moral regeneration of his people. Rammohan operated on two fronts. Convinced of the need for the purification of the religious life of the Hindus in the direction of a syncretic theism, he founded the Brahmo Sabha in 1828 with a view to synthesizing the most valuable elements of vedic religion and Protestant Christianity. He also launched or supported campaigns for the eradication of social abuses in Hindu society, such as child marriage, caste taboos of various kinds, restriction on the remarriage of widows, and, above all, the practice of sati. Rammohan's reconstituted ethical Hinduism emphasized monistic theism and rejected idolatory, ritualism and the authority of the Brahmans, replacing the latter by scripturalism (see Jones 1989, Madan 1997: chaps 6–7).

The universal religion that Roy had envisaged was perhaps too austere and virtually died with him. His successors were less broadminded and eclectic, leaning by turns toward Hinduism or Christianity. However, they concerned themselves with determination with his objective of social reform within Hindu society. The Sabha, which had been renamed Brahmo Samaj in 1843, split in 1865 as the younger members, led by Keshub Chandra Sen, felt disturbed by what they considered a retreat into Brahmanical ritual and symbolism. While they drew closer to the teachings of Jesus, and even strove for an Indian version of Christianity, Hindu Bengal was captivated by Sri Ramakrishna (1836–86), a unique Shakta Brahman mystic. He was little concerned with society at large, but, like Rammohan, he too was attracted to the idea of the synthesis of religions, not on the intellectual plane but in experiential terms. Not only did he reject sectarianism within Hinduism, he even lived during different phases of his spiritual quest as a Christian and as a Muslim, but always came back to his Shakta devotion, emphasizing the unity of all religious experience. By all accounts, he achieved his personal goal of 'god-realization'.

The issue from the point of view of Hindu society at large was how to make people everywhere share this experience. The person who attempted this was Ramakrishna's favourite disciple, Vivekananda (1863–1902). Rammohan's striving for a consensual theology appears modest in retrospect compared to the immensity of Ramakrishna's spiritual quest and the vast scope of Vivekananda's 'mission', which was to establish the supremacy of vedantic Hinduism on a worldwide basis. Vivekananda found much to criticize in Hindu society. He condemned its excessive ritualism, indifference to human misery, and sectarianism and casteism. 'No religion on earth

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preaches the dignity of humanity in such lofty strains as Hinduism', he wrote, 'and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism' (see de Reincourt 1961: 245).

As a religious leader, Vivekananda was a reformer and a unifier. He regretted the proliferation of sects and castes and tried to bring them together by asserting that 'one who understands them ... can trace them back to the ideas of the Upanishads' (see Panikkar 1963: 31). He was also a preacher at home and abroad. In India, he advocated the service and the uplift of the exploited and the miserable in the spirit of love and sacrifice: 'they alone live who live for others'. Beyond India, he asked Indians to dedicate themselves to 'the conquest of the whole world ... nothing less than that' (see de Bary 1959: II, 103, 100). This was Practical Vedanta.

If Bengal was in the forefront of the Hindu renaissance, Maharashtra was not far behind. It contributed in a major way to Hindu religious revivalism and social reform. Mahadev Govind Ranade 1841–1901), assuming the leadership of the Prarthana Samaj (established in 1867 in Pune), tried to broaden the scope of its activities. Firmly rooted in Hinduism, the Samaj looked forward to reforming Hindu society: marriage reforms with a view to improving the position of women and the girl child received particular attention. Ranade wrote in 1872 of his conviction that 'a universal kingdom of God on earth' would replace 'sectional churches', for all religions were evolving towards 'pure theism' (see Kellock 1926: 166). In consonance with his ideas on religious evolution, his proposals for religious reform were explicitly a repudiation of revivalism, but that was not exactly what happened. The revivalists in fact derived strength from the reforms which never were radical enough, in Maharashtra even less than in Bengal.

Hindu revivalism found its most uncompromising exponent in Dayananda Sarasvati (1824–83), a Gujarati vedic scholar and sannyasi. His call was for a return to the vedas and a complete rejection of post-vedic and post-upanishadic developments in Hinduism. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were criticized as heresies, and Christianity and Islam rejected as false religions. As for the Hindu orthodoxy, the so-called *sanatana dharma*, he attacked the notion of embodied divinity, idol worship, excessive ritualism, the practice of untouchability, child marriage, the subjection of women and other social evils that, in his view, had corrupted the true vedic dharma and created an inequitable society. He founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 in Mumbai, but it was only after he came to Punjab two years later that his socio-religious movement acquired a mass following, primarily because Christian missionaries, with covert government support, had been of late quite active in the province. Also, the Muslim presence was here more

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prominent in numbers than in western India. Dayananda stressed the importance of education and social service, and blessed the idea of the reconversion, through a ritual of purification (*shuddhi*), of Hindus converted to other religions (see Jordens 1978).

The self-confidence of Vivekananda and the combativeness of Dayananda were soon to have implications outside the domains of religion, culture and society—in the arena of politics. Although the Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Vivekananda in 1897, and the Arya Samaj disclaimed political goals, their impact on the emerging Hindu political leadership—and the impact of similar movements and organizations in other parts of the country (see Jones 1989)—had been so widespread that a linkage between religious revivalism and nationalism was inevitable. And that is what happened, despite Vivekananda's warning that, if India gave up the religious quest in favour of politics, she would die. Obviously, he considered religion a sui generis phenomenon unconnected with politics—a point of view that we now know to be misleading. What happened, namely the coming together of religion and politics, was indeed bound to happen.

NATIONALISM, HINDUTVA, AND TOLERATION

Rammohan Roy had great faith in the advantages of British rule, and hoped for a socio-cultural and religious renaissance under its auspices, for he considered it a civilizing force. 'India needs many more years of British domination', he wrote (see de Reincourt 1961: 230). Little did he realize that, within a few decades of his death, a resurgent Hinduism would begin to sprout political ambitions and strive to oust the very same British rule from India.

An important element in the political awakening of India was a growing liberalism in the West itself. Education through the medium of English, modelled after British schools and colleges, became the principal vehicle of this influence. Understandably, it was in Indian literatures that the nationalist urges of the new middle classes found their first utterance. In this connection, the name that comes to mind first of all is that of Bankimchandra Chatterji (1838–94). His famous novel *Ananda Math* (1876) gave pointed expression to the Hindu aversion to aliens, whether Muslims or the British, and his opposition to their cultural and political domination of India. It contained the very well known poem, *Vande Mataram* ('I bow to the Mother!', see Das 1984: 228–9), which identified India with the supreme mother goddess of Bengali Hinduism. This hymn became the national song during the freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress and formally retains that status in free India. It initiated the use of religious

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symbolism in modern Indian politics. India became *Bharat Mata*, Mother India.

Chatterji even wrote of a 'national religion' rooted in the vedas, which were for him 'nothing less than the basis of our entire religious and social organization' (see Chatterjee 1986: 61). Moreover, he argued that the way to national freedom and honour lay through a positive attitude to power and history defined not merely in material but also cultural terms. The first task then was Hindu religious and cultural regeneration. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he was ready to put even the vedas aside, if necessary, as 'they [did] not represent the living religion of India' (see Das 1984: 160). He gave preference to the puranas over the upanishads because of the other-worldliness of the latter. Bankimchandra's project of national, cultural-political regeneration, in which patriotism and humanism were considered the highest values, anticipated a fundamentalist turn in Hindu politics, focussing as it did on a sense of crisis, selective cultural retrieval and political power (see Madan 1997: 208–10). Indeed, he was perhaps the first Indian to use the term 'Hindutva' (in part 3, chapter 1 of *Ananda Math*) to signify a homogenized Hindu identity defined in opposition to a similar, internally undifferentiated Muslim identity. Others, including Rabindranath Tagore, were to use this term later, but more about that below.

The combination of the western ideas of nationalism and patriotism with an activist interpretation of Hinduism found considerable support and existed alongside the formal secularist agenda of the Congress, which was shaped by its multi-religious (Hindu–Muslim–Christian–Parsi) leadership. From the Hindu perspective, Vivekananda was characteristically emphatic. He wrote: 'The bond of unity in India ... is not language or race but religion.' It followed that if one had to 'speak of politics in India', one had to 'speak through the language of religion'. 'National union in India', he maintained, 'must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune' (see Basu 2002: 69,70,79 et passim).

Others spoke similarly. Thus, Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950) proclaimed: 'Nationalism is not a mere political programme; nationalism is a religion that has come from God' (see de Bary 1959: II, 727). In Maharashtra, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) played a particularly notable part in weaving together Hindu religious and nationalist sentiments. He recruited the Hindu deity Ganesha/Ganapati to the national cause by skilfully converting a popular annual festival dedicated to him into the occasion for intensified anti-British demonstrations in an atmosphere of religious fervour (see Cashman 1975). The seventeenth-century Maratha hero Shivaji, who had challenged the Mughal empire and carved out a Hindu principality, was

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also honoured with a festival. Appeal to Hindu religious sentiment undoubtedly helped to draw Hindus together on an all-India scale, but it also alienated the Muslims. Originating in a complex historical situation, Muslim separatism, which existed on its own, was strengthened by the manner in which the Hindus among the Congress leadership effortlessly, but not unselfconsciously, resorted to the use of religious rhetoric and symbols.

The leadership of the Congress passed into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) on the death of Tilak in 1920. In 1915, while Tilak was still the dominant personality in nationalist politics, Gandhi said he wanted to spiritualize it, which meant for him the re-establishment of an imperative link between religious (ethical) values and secular interests. When Tilak wrote to him that politics was a game of wordly people, not of sadhus, Gandhi replied: 'For me there is no conflict .... I venture to say that it betrays mental laziness to think that the world is not for *sadhus*' (see Iyer 1973: 30). He explained further in his autobiography that his 'devotion to Truth [had] drawn [him] into the field of politics'; and that 'those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means' (Gandhi 1927: 615).

To take the national movement out of the 'drawing rooms' of the educated middle classes, and make it a mass movement, inevitably meant Hinduizing it too, given the preponderance of Hindus in the country's population. Gandhi used such expressions as *daridra-narayan* (God is the poor, or the poor are God), *harijan* (the people of God) to refer to the 'untouchable' castes, and *rama-raj* (God's kingdom) to visualize a moral and just independent India. On their part, the masses responded to Gandhi's call as to that of a *mahatma*, a man of religion with spiritual attainments and even magical powers. While holding on to the position that he could not conceive of 'politics as divorced from religion', he clarified: 'This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality' (1984: 54).

Gandhi's efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims in the pursuit of not only the national goal of independence, but ultimately of the good life, failed in the end. Extremist elements among both communities alike repudiated his vision and leadership. To the Hindus he was a foe of their religion, to the Muslims, of their aspiration for separation. His courting of Muslim support for the common cause of freedom through support for the reactionary Khilafat movement (1919–20) only exacerbated the communal divide among the people. A quarter of a century later, Gandhi was to fall at the hands of a Hindu.

The Hindu Mahasabha, established in 1915 for the promotion of Hindu interests, was reactivated. Some Hindu leaders of even the Congress

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emphasized the need for Hindu consolidation. A significant event was the publication in 1923 of a small book, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, by a notable Mahasabha leader, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Going back to the original meaning of 'Hindu' as the people who lived between the river Sindhu and the sea, and generalizing the same, and further adding the defining religious attribute of the possession of the vedas as their scriptures, he asserted that, for these people, their country was both their fatherland (*pitribhu*) and their holy land (*punyabhu*). By these commonalties, they constituted one nation. The acknowledgement of a common nationality (*rashtra*), a common race (*jati*), and a common culture or civilization (*sanskriti*) constituted, in Savarkar's opinion, the ideology of 'Hindutva' or 'Hindu-ness' (see Savarkar 1989: 116).

Savarkar clarified that Hindutva was a complex whole of which Hinduism was only 'a derivative, a fraction, a part' (ibid.: 3). Further, he insisted that Hinduism 'should be restored to its proper significance to denote the religions of all Hindus', including in this broad category Sanatan Dharmis, Arya Samajis, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and even some tribal communities (ibid.: 107, 113). Those communities, whether of non-Indian origin or descended from converts, who did not look upon India as their 'holyland' were to be excluded from the 'nation', although they may remain in the 'country'. They could be 'incorporated' in the nation only if they 'look upon our land not only as the land of [their] love but even of [their] worship' (ibid.: 84). The 'choice of love' was open to them, for they were 'our country-men and our old kith and kin' (ibid.: 115).

Savarkar's hegemonistic thesis has in recent years acquired the status of the manifesto of Hindu fundamentalism, which is totalitarian in relation to those forcibly grouped together as the Hindus, and exclusivist towards those stigmatized as aliens, the 'others'. The emphasis on scriptures characteristic of the nineteenth-century reformers was originally replaced by an overweening accent on culture. In the process, the notion of the 'chosen' or 'special' people characteristic of fundamentalist movements was sharpened as a political concept.

It is paradoxical, therefore, that the public organization that clearly was deeply influenced by Savarkar's ideas about Hindu identity, namely the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded at Nagpur in 1925, should have disclaimed an interest in politics. This changed wth the establishment of the Jana Sangh in 1951, later renamed as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964. Today the 'Sangh Parivar' (family) as the organizations are called, covers every aspect of public life (see Jaffrelot 1996). Their emergence has proceeded hand in hand with heightened religiosity among Hindus, particularly the urban middle classes.

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New deities, new sacred symbols, and new forms of collective rituals have arisen to emphasize Hindu solidarity. Hostility toward religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, is the other face of the same coin. This hostility appeared at its destructive worst in the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992, and reached a barbaric climax in the pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, following the burning of a train-load of Hindus at Godhra by a Muslim crowd. Gujarat is where Gandhi came from. Whatever has happened to Gandhi's humane Hinduism?

Religious toleration is usually claimed as a precious element of Hindu cultural heritage, going back to the early vedic period. The Rig Veda says, *ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*: the Truth (or the Real) is one; the sages call it by various names (I.164.46). Since the late nineteenth century this aphorism has been cited often as evidence of Hindu tolerance, among others by Vivekananda, the philosopher S. Radhakrishnan, and the sociologist M. N. Srinivas. In the years since independence, Indian secularism has come to be defined as *sarva dharma samabhava*, equal respect (or goodwill) for all religions on the part of both the citizen and the state. Fundamentalist tendencies that are in evidence are generally considered aberrant and a modern development, which, strictly speaking, they are. The internal diversities of faith and practice that have made many scholars question the existence of a single Hindu religious tradition, testify to the empirical validity of Hindu pluralism. A critical element of the Hindu tradition is the idea of identity by birth. One is born a Hindu and cannot become one. The idea of proselytization is absent; this absence in turn entails the acknowledgement of the existence of other faiths and other ways of life. Similarly, one is born into a caste and maybe expelled from it, but cannot enter it by choice. Castes as collectivities have been known to successfully improve their ritual and social statuses, but individuals cannot do so within the traditional system.

To put the foregoing differently, the spirit of toleration claimed for the Hindu religious tradition is a cultural dimension of the hierarchical caste system. Plurality is recognized, but difference does not readily yield equality. Vivekananda, often hailed as an exemplar of Hindu pluralism, consistently maintained that included in Vedanta was all that is good in other religions and it was therefore complete and perfect. This did not, however, entitle a Hindu to show disrespect for other religions or to forcibly impose Vedanta upon their followers. The conquest of the world that he called for was to be through intellectual illumination.

It is precisely the ideas of completion and perfection that Gandhi rejected. He put forward the most explicit formulation of tolerant religious pluralism when he announced on 30 May 1913 that, in his opinion, 'the

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world as a whole will never have, and need not have a single religion'. By acknowledging his indebtedness to the Jain doctrine of the 'many-sidedness' of reality (*anekantavad*), Christian charity (the Sermon on the Mount), and Islamic unity of believers (*umma*), he implied that Hinduism would be enriched by the assimilation of the truths found in other religions. While he maintained that all religions were true, he added that because of the imperfections of human intellect they were also imperfect. This genuinely stands for the attitude of humility toward or respect for all. The Gandhian vision is, however, as yet only a Utopia.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the many Hindus who tried to reinterpret the Hindu religious tradition in the twentieth century. His orientation was, if one may say so, 'sociological' since he saw the 'divine' in the 'human' and the 'social'. (Needless to say, his philosophical presuppositions were theistic and not positivistic.) Other thinkers also have contributed to the interpretive discourse on Hinduism, starting from other presuppositions than the Gandhian. Thus, while Gandhi was a socio-political activist, Aurobindo privileged the intellectual and yogic endeavours. He modified the traditional monistic (*advaita*) position on the nature of empirical reality, and looked forward to a more highly evolved world and a deeper truth-consciousness. Ramana Maharishi (1879–1950) stressed self-questioning ('who am I?') to experience the truth of human existence ('I am thou'). Between themselves, these three religious thinkers valorize action (*achar*), thought (*vichar*), and experience (*anubhav*) as complementary modes of truth-realization.

Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), intimately familiar with the classical Indian religions and philosophies as well as Christianity and western philosophy, was an idealist, a univeralist, and a reconciler within the vedantic (monist) tradition. For him too, as for Gandhi, Hinduism was ultimately a way of life and not only a mode of thought. These remarks about the contributions of traditional, modern and eclectic religious thinkers are, of course, elementary, and *only indicative* of the vitality of Hinduism in the twentieth century. My lack of familiarity with the field of religious studies forbids further comment.

Apart from individual thinkers, there have also arisen new movements within the Hindu religious tradition or spun off from it. One of the most successful and best known of these movements is the Radhasaomi Satsang that took birth in the late nineteenth century, and has since then spawned several communities in north India, numbering about a couple of million,

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and found other habitats besides the original one at Dayalbagh in Agra. This 'modern faith' appeals to 'those [Indians, Hindus] who for various reasons have tired of the modern world but are unsatisfied with what the more traditional forms of faith offer as alternatives' (Juergensmeyer 1991: 225). Originally an urban upper-caste movement, it has in course of time expanded to include villagers and lower caste people also. The position of the 'master' (guru) is of critical importance in Radhasaomi communities. They have also attracted followers in the west, perhaps because of the valorization of human agency and personal authority. In the Hindu setting, the reiteration of the traditional ideal of 'self-less service' (*seva*) as the means to spiritual advancement lends its great appeal.

The importance of world affirmation, rather than renunciation, and the central role of a charismatic founding guru is characteristic of the many new religious movements that have flourished under the canopy of Hinduism, or at its edges, in the twentieth century. One of the best examples of this, besides the Radhasaomi Satsang, is the cult of Sathya Sai Baba (b. 1926), south Indian in origin and institutional location, but drawing its following from all over India and abroad. Not bereft of its share of miracles and controversies, the cult is as noteworthy for its social ameliorative projects of education and health-care as for its ability to fulfil the spiritual needs of its members. It is by their material contributions and voluntary social work that such projects are initiated and sustained.

These modern cults do not necessarily require the participants to give up their earlier religious faiths; indeed they are considered modern expressions of Hinduism by some observers. As such, they are not identical but marked as much by differences as similarities. Whether formally outside the Hindu fold (as the original Radhasaomi cult), or in close proximity to it (like the Sathya Sai Baba cult), these new faiths 'cannot be fully understood outside a Hindu context' (Babb 1986: 205). Indeed, they are permeated by cognitive categories, emotional attitudes, and performative styles that are recognizably Hindu and underscore deep underlying unities among them.

There are other movements that are more explicitly Hindu. Among them some have an international presence. The Swaminarayan movement within the Vaishnava tradition originated in Gujarat in the early nineteenth century. Its founding guru has since been accorded the status of an avatar. Its following came from all but the 'untouchable' castes. The movement prospered, segmented, and went abroad to Britain in the 1950s, where it is now one of the largest religions of Indian origin (see Williams 1984).

Another contemporary Vaishnava movement took birth in the United States, and has since spread to many countries and come to India too. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded

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in New York in 1965 by the newly-arrived Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), who belonged to the Chaitanya *sampradaya* (see Gelberg 1983). There was nothing new in the devotional and philosophical aspects of the Hare Krishna movement (as it came to be called), based as these were on the *Bhagavat Purana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* respectively. What was striking was the following, which consisted almost entirely of American youth. Prabhupada's arrival in the USA from India coincided with the peak of the counter-culture movement, and found instant acceptance among those young men and women who were equally dissatisfied with their own religio-cultural tradition and with its hippy-style rejection. To that extent the Hare Krishna movement was more American than Indian, but with its temples and religious processions it is a presence in many Indian cities today including, interestingly, Vrindaban, the original home of the Krishna cults.

There have been many other Hindu teachers and gurus who have worked in and outside India and acquired an international following. Mahesh Yogi, with his yogic techniques of 'transcendental meditation' (TM) and extravagant claims about the comprehensiveness of vedic knowledge, comes readily to mind. Another prominent teacher was the serious and sober Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), who repudiated all religions and debunked all gurus. For him 'Truth was a pathless land' in which every seeker had to be his own guide. It was through the cultivation of 'choiceless awareness', rather than through formal instruction at another's hands that self-realization, or 'total freedom', was possible (see Krishnamurti 1996). His disavowals notwithstanding, Krishnamurti's intellectual roots were in Brahmanical and Buddhist philosophies.

What all these teachers and movements—and I have mentioned only a few—have done is to make Hinduism in its various expressions (devotional, cultural, philosophical, yogic, etc.) a world religion. Vedanta may not have exactly conquered the world, as Vivekananda wanted it to do, but Hinduism has come a long way since his exhortations were made in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Today, with twenty million Indians, or people of Indian origin, living in well over a hundred countries, most of them self-acknowledged Hindus, Hinduism is widely known but, perhaps, not well understood. Scholarly study of Indic religions and philosophies have, however, progressed enormously in the meanwhile. It is a multi-disciplinary and international collaborative effort with an immense future.

* * *

This essay has been concerned with looking at the Hindu religious tradition from the large-scale perspectives of a long eventful history—not merely a

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past—and sub-continental spread. Its roots lie in vedic religion; it has grown continuously but without losing that sense of rootedness. Its growth is reflected in the textual tradition, and has been marked by the processes of elaboration, innovation, and segmentation, of fusion and fission. Hinduism has drawn upon the rich folk traditions of the country, and has remained in live contact with two major movements of dissent within the vedic tradition that have themselves grown into the religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism. (However much we may dislike them, these names are now embedded in both everyday speech and scholarly writing.) Along with the much younger Virashaivism in the south (early twelfth century), and Sikhism in the north (300 years later), these traditions now constitute the family of Indic religions, sharing many common metaphysical presuppositions (for instance, the notions of dharma and karma) and ritual idioms (see Madan 1989).

Hinduism also has a history of productive interaction with two other major religious traditions of India that originally arrived here from abroad, and have had their own *Indian* histories, namely Christianity and Islam. Following the establishment of Portuguese power in India early in the sixteenth century, and subsequently of other western nations, notably the British, a linkage between Christianity and the colonial states was forged. This generated, as aspects of nationalism, movements of religious reform and revival within Hinduism. In short, Hinduism has never ceased to change and grow. Today it is a world religion attempting to cope with the challenges of modernization and secularization and of the diaspora (see Vertowec 2000).

Lost in the macro-perspective is the character, meaning and significance of Hinduism in the intimacies of personal life lived in the setting of the family and the community. These aspects of it have been studied by anthropologists and sociologists, and a considerable body of published work is now available. Such studies have been marked by the effort to look at religion not as a domain apart, but as a dimension of a many-sided social reality. A model of empirically-grounded holistic description of a Hindu community was written by a sociologist, N. A. Thooti, in the 1920s. Drawing upon the textual tradition, he chose the notions of *marga* ('the way'), *mata* ('the doctrine that justifies the way'), and *sampradaya* ('which combines a way and its doctrines in terms of a sect or following') (1935: 64) as his first principles. From these he proceeded to analyze the social organization of the Vaishnavas of Gujarat in terms of varna, caste, lineage, and family, as also their economic life (the village community, trade guilds, towns, cities), and literature, drama and the fine arts. A splendidly holistic effort, this book has not received the attention it deserves.

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The trendsetter for modern ethnographic studies of religion is M. N. Srinivas's classic monograph on the Coorgs (see Srinivas 1952, new edition 2003), a Hinduizing community of south India. He explored the function of ritual in the maintenance of social solidarity, and introduced the notions of Sanskritization and of levels or degrees of spread of Hinduism from the local to the regional and the subcontinental. The many empirical studies of Hinduism that have since accumulated discuss life-cycle rituals, domestic and temple worship, seasonal festivals, pilgrimages; values such as auspiciousness and purity, world affirmation and renunciation; strategies of coping with suffering and death; the role of charismatic preceptors and the institutionalization of religious activity; preservation of the tradition and innovation; and so on (see Fuller 1992). Limitations of space preclude anything more than a mere acknowledgement of these aspects of Hinduism.

The sociological study of any religion raises many questions of theoretical perspective and method. These are important but outside the scope of this essay. However, I trust it does offer an introduction to Hinduism as a living tradition and a subject of scholarly study.

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* This essay was written in January 2003. It overlaps marginally with a 1977 essay that appeared in modified form as the Epilogue in *Non-Renunciation* (1987). The present essay is not a revision of the earlier one: it is different in scope, discusses new issues, and includes judgments that too are different.

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HINDUISM
A Religion to Live By

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

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Me dit un jour le grand Chiron –

Cherchez-vous les dieux, ô Macarée! et d'où sont issus les hommes, les animaux et les principes du feu universel?

Mais le vieil Océan*, père de toutes choses, retient en lui-même ces secrets, et les nymphes qui l'entourent décrivent en chantant un chœur éternel devant lui, pour couvrir ce qui pourrait s'évader de ses lèvres entr'ouvertes par le sommeil.

Les mortels qui touchèrent les dieux par leur vertu ont reçu de leurs mains des lyres pour charmer les peuples, ou des semences nouvelles pour les enrichir, mais rien de leur bouche inexorable.

* * *

Les dieux jaloux ont enfoui quelque part les témoignages de la descendance des choses; mais au bord de quel océan ont-ils roulé la pierre qui les couvre, ô Macarée!

LE CENTAURE
Maurice de Guérin

* Ouranos = Varuna

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EXPLANATIONS

The book contains many Sanskrit words which are essential to an exact definition of the concepts of Hinduism. But at their first occurrence and frequently in important contexts an approximate English translation has been given. Therefore a special glossary has not been provided. However, certain explanations are called for.

1. It must be understood that the word 'Hinduism' is only a convenient term for the religious beliefs and practices of the Hindus, and was never used by them. Even the word 'Hindu' was not used by them to designate themselves except when, under Muslim rule, they employed this Muslim term for this purpose. Etymologically the word 'Hindu' means the same thing as 'Indian'. At first, even the British used the word 'Gentoo' for the adherents of the Hindu religion.

2. Three words of similar sound will be found in the book: 'Brahmin', 'Brahman', and 'Brāhmanic'. The first word means a man of the Brāhmana caste, and has been adopted in the English language in the spelling given. The second word 'Brahman' means the absolute entity which is the ultimate reality in Hindu religion and philosophy. The word 'Brāhmanic' means that part of the Hindu religion which has come down from early Indo-Aryan times.

3. The transliteration of the Sanskrit into the Roman alphabet in this book follows the standard system in the citations, but in the text diacritical marks are given only when there is a possibility of mistaking the exact word. Besides, *ch* and not *c* is used for the English *ch* sound (i.e. as in *chat*). Also *sh* is used for the cerebral *ṣ*. In the citations from old English books the spelling of the original has been retained.

4. Except in special cases, no references to the sources of information have been given, although in the case of citations the title of the book and the name of the author have been mentioned.

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As before, I am obliged to the staffs of the Indian Institute of the Bodleian Library and London Library for their courtesy. The Kipling Estate managed by A. P. Watt & Son has given me permission to quote from the story: *The Bridge-builders*, for which I am grateful.

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N. C. C.

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PREFACE

This book attempts to give a description and interpretation of the religion of the Hindus as practised and experienced by them. It is not a summary of their mythology, dogmas, and rituals as found in the texts. Information from them has been included in the description only when there was reason to believe that it related to actual practice at some historic period. The emphasis is throughout on the religious psychology and behaviour of the Hindus. The methodological principles on which the historical account and the descriptions offered are based are set out in the initial chapters of Part I and Part II. In Part III some important features are examined in greater detail.

The book is addressed to those who, either in India or in the outside world, take an intellectual interest in Hinduism in all its greatness and strangeness as the product of a particular kind of mind in a particular environment. It is not meant for those who go to Hinduism from some personal emotional pressure, or to put it more bluntly, for those who seek in Hinduism what they feel they do not find in the religion into which they were born, or simply an anodyne for psychological malaise. I have had to say some hard words about Hinduizing Occidentals.

Yet I have not written the book on the assumption that the religion can only be a subject of detached intellectual interest, without implications for life as lived in the present age. For one thing, no one can deal with India, or understand the social and cultural life of the people of the country, without a knowledge of Hinduism, which has influenced the behaviour even of non-Hindus. Next, religion still remains a great issue for mankind, even though it is in a shambles in the contemporary world, and Hinduism is a great religion of a particular kind. An account of it might lead to a better understanding of the religious urge in man, which is innate.

I am actuated by this conviction, although I had lost faith in the tenets of Hinduism and indeed in all established religions long ago. On account of this conviction, I have read and thought

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about the religion and also other religions all my life, and I have observed the practice of Hinduism at first hand. This book, put in its final shape on the day I completed my eightieth year, is the product of that life-long preoccupation. However, the study of Hinduism is in such a confused state that my account of it must be regarded as very tentative, only as the starting point of a new approach to it.

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

Oxford
23 November 1977

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS HINDUISM?

THIS introduction is meant to be an overture to the account of Hinduism offered in the body of the book. Actually, I had intended to set down my view of the essential character of the religion quite explicitly in an epilogue, instead of leaving it to be inferred from the incidental remarks made in the course of describing its beliefs and practices. But after nearly completing the book I decided to transfer the essay to its beginning and make that a prologue. Here was a case which could illustrate Pascal's dictum that the last thing an author discovers when writing a book is what to put first.

The reason for it was imperative. Hinduism is a human phenomenon of immense magnitude and is overpowering not only by reason of that, but also owing to its bewildering diversity. Even in dealing with the far less varied Greek religion, Father E. des Places, S.J., observed in his book *La Religion grecque* (1969): 'Elle a si peu d'unité qu'on en parle plus justement au pluriel, comme je l'ai fait précédemment après d'autres, en intitulant l'exposé: "Les Religions de la Grèce antique". Et pourtant la religion occupe dans la vie grecque une place considérable et constante.' Hinduism can be described as many religions with greater aptness, and it also pervades Hindu life as lived in the world in every nook and cranny.

In dealing with Hinduism, many writers have tried to overcome the difficulty of coping with the endless and confusing diversities in it by being selective and giving an exposition of only those features which in their view contain its religious message. But the religion cannot be divided up in this way, and to be selective about it is to falsify its true character. Despite its all-too-obvious inconsistencies, Hinduism is one whole. Even those features in it which seem to have no connection with religion, as understood today, stem from its basic character as natural offshoots.

On the other hand, to describe all its varied features exhaustively is out of the question in a book of one volume. Therefore the method least open to objection would be to include all the

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features which make Hinduism the kind of religion it is, only reducing them to a small scale. This also will have its disadvantage, for a summary presentation of all its characteristic features is bound to throw the apparent inconsistencies of Hinduism into higher relief. Thus, whatever the method, the modern reader will have one difficulty or another in following any account of the religion which purports to show it as what it really is. To avoid this it is necessary to prepare him in advance for what he is going to meet, and to make him realize that Hinduism is a special kind of religion which has to be met on its own terms. This is what this introduction aims at doing.

The Western Approach

In reading about Hinduism the reader must emancipate himself from the prepossession created by the current conception of religion. It is of European origin, but has been adopted even by modern Hindus under the influence of Western thought. It was shaped by Christianity, but partly also by Judaism and Islam, all of which constitute a particular family of religions.

Christian thought has given to the word 'religion' a meaning in all modern European languages which the Latin word *religio*, from which it is derived, never had. Even to the Latin word the Christian Fathers gave one etymological meaning, and the classical Latin writers another. For instance, Tertullian derived it from the verb *ligare*—to bind, but Cicero from *legere*—to collect, gather together. Lactantius said that religion was a bond of piety between man and the Divinity. It is this conception of religion into which Hinduism will not fit. It is based on a wholly different idea of the need for religion and its function.

Furthermore, the serious student of Hinduism will also have to break with the whole Western tradition about the religious life of the Hindus which has been in existence for centuries, and strangely enough continues down to this day. The tradition originated with the Greeks and Romans, and by the third century of the Christian era it seems to have popularized a vague idea in the eastern parts of the Roman empire that the Hindus were endowed with all kinds of esoteric knowledge. Thus Plotinus, the creator of Neo-Platonism, wished to become acquainted with the philosophical ideas of the Persians and Indians in order to develop the line of

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philosophical and mystic thinking into which he had been led by the teaching of the philosopher Ammonius. Accordingly, he accompanied the Emperor Gordian in his campaign against Persia, but had to give up his quest and come back when the Emperor was killed in Mesopotamia.

It would be interesting to find out what notions Plotinus had about the religious and philosophical speculations of the Hindus. The teachings of Zoroaster were known to the Greeks and Romans, but it is improbable that they had any exact knowledge of Hindu philosophy, which was not systematized in the third century A.D. All that can be said is that Plotinus, like many others in the Graeco-Roman world, may have been familiar with the notions about India current in that world. These were all descended from the accounts given by the companions of Alexander the Great in his invasion of the Punjab and reproduced by Strabo, Pliny, Arrian, Plutarch, and other classical writers. As will be seen later, they gave very little information about the religion of the Hindus, but related stories about the Gymnosophists (naked philosophers) and the Brahmins. These men became stock figures in all classical accounts of India, and stories about them became a pendant to the legend of gold-digging ants recorded by Herodotus.

But the more sensational stories about India and her wise men are to be found in the collection of legendary writings known as the Alexander Romance, which is a folk epic about Alexander the Great. The earliest work in it was written in Ptolemaic Egypt, probably in the third century B.C., by an Alexandrian, whom modern scholars call Pseudo-Callisthenes. There were later Latin versions of this Greek work, and also many Latin tracts about the Brahmins written in the Middle Ages. All these finally consolidated the reputation of the Hindus for esoteric knowledge in Europe. Curiously enough, there are writers even of our time who are naïve enough to take these writings seriously.

As there was no direct communication between India and Europe until the end of the fifteenth century, the ideas about Hindu religion and philosophy which are found in the works of classical writers held the field down to that age. Even in the succeeding centuries realistic accounts of Hindu religion and philosophy were given only by the Christian missionaries who went to India, while the theoretical scholars stuck to the legends.

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Of this contrast, a good illustration can be given. Henry Lord, an English clergyman who wrote the very first book on Hinduism based on first-hand knowledge in any European language, said that the Hindus might have got their idea of transmigration of souls from Pythagoras. On the contrary, Thomas La Grue, a French scholar who annotated the second book on Hinduism published in Europe (whose author was Abraham Roger, a Dutch missionary), wrote in his introduction that the Brahmins 'were people who are usually said to be endowed with extra-ordinary judgement, and with a science or knowledge which is perfect; to whom even Pythagoras and Plato were not ashamed to go in search of wisdom and knowledge; it is even held that they borrowed much of their philosophy from them.' La Grue's adherence to the classical tradition is also revealed in other ways: e.g., he gave the title *La Porte ouverte, pour parvenir à la connoissance du paganism caché* to the French translation of the book by Roger; referred to all the classical writers on India as his authorities; spoke of the Gymnosophists; and in his notes brought in Hermes Trismegistos many times.[1]

This legend of Hindu wisdom and esoteric knowledge, which filled a vacuum created by ignorance, has to be accounted for. The explanation of its beginnings is easily given. It was created by the Greeks who had gone to India with Alexander, and left accounts of the Gymnosophists or naked philosophers. In them the Greeks were meeting men who claimed to be philosophers, a type very well known to them, and who yet struck them as being very strange in their behaviour.

What appeared so to them could not have been the nudity by itself, for they were used to that in their athletes; nor the matted hair, ashes and paint on the body, and the dirtiness, for they were becoming used to such things by seeing the antics of the Cynics; they must have been overwhelmed by the combination of these traits with attitudes which did not go with them: an overbearing air of superiority, a gravity which was not consistent with their appearance, total absense of humour or malice in their exhibition of unconventionality, and a self-confidence which would not even condescend to air any contempt for worldliness.

The impact of such behaviour may easily be imagined. In admitting the superiority of other men over themselves, ordinary

[1] For Lord and Roger, see p .104ff.

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human beings are swayed, not by the content of the mind, but by a behaviour which creates an impression of greatness by virtue of its abnormality. The fact is that the more rational a set of men are, the more ready are they to succumb to an assertive irrationality. The Hindu ascetics who ostensibly seemed to be philosophers to the Greeks created such a confrontation.

They were assertive and exhibited an intense desire to domineer over their fellow-men, and yet they were wholly egocentric and indifferent to everybody. They employed both speech and silence with equal effect as instruments of self-assertion: they poured out rigmarole which gave an impression of profundity, and at the same time affected a taciturnity which had the same effect. Above all, they could sink into unconsciousness and yet seem to have attained to the highest state of consciousness. The basic aim of Hindu mystical life, which is to convert all inward experience into physical states perceptible to the senses, was so far realized by them as to intimidate most rational minds. The Hindu Sadhus were pythons of the psychic world, whose slumbrous coils contained, and at the same time hid, the force of a battering ram in the head.

How even a powerful and practical European mind could be influenced by the behaviour of Hindu religious men can be illustrated by what Warren Hastings wrote in a letter to the Chairman of the East India Company, in which he recommended the publication of the translation of the *Gita* into English by Charles Wilkins.[1] He was trying to disarm in advance any objection on the score of the obscurity of the text, which might repel the Western mind. To lead to this he first described a personal experience. 'I myself was once,' he wrote, 'a witness of a man employed in this species of devotion[2] at the principal temple of Banaris. His right hand and arm were enclosed in a loose sleeve or bag of red cloth, within which he passed the beads of his rosary, one after another, through his fingers, repeating with the touch of each (as I was informed) one of the names of God, while his mind laboured to catch and dwell on the idea of the quality which appertained to it,

[1] See p. 107 for particulars of the book.

[2] The manner was explained by Hastings in these words: 'It is required of those who practice this exercise, not only that they divest their minds of all sensual desire, but that their attention be abstracted from every external object, and absorbed, with every sense, in the prescribed subject of their meditation.'

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and shewed the violence of its exertion to attain this purpose by the convulsive movements of all his features, his eyes being at the same time closed, doubtless to assist the abstraction.'

This is, of course, the well-known *dhyana* (meditation) of Hindu devotees, in which they have to visualize the physical manifestation of the god or goddess as given in a ready-made formula. But Warren Hastings connected the behaviour of the man he saw with the last admonition of Krishna to Arjuna in the *Gita* and quoted the couplet: 'Hath what I have been speaking, O Arjoon, been heard *with thy mind fixed to one point*? Is the *distraction* of thought, which arose from thy ignorance, removed?'[1] (Italics by Hastings himself.)

Then he offered an explanation of what he saw which shows what concessions a very intelligent European was ready to make to Hindu religious behaviour. He wrote:

> To those who have never been accustomed to this separation of the mind from the notices of the senses, it may not be easy to conceive by what means such a power is to be attained; since even the most studious men of our hemisphere will find it difficult so to restrain their attention but that it will wander to some object of present sense or recollection; and even the buzzing of a fly will sometimes have the power to disturb it. But if we are told that there have been men who were successively, for ages past, in the daily habit of abstracted contemplation, begun in the earliest period of youth, and continued in many to the maturity of age, each adding some portion of knowledge to the store accumulated by his predecessors; it is not assuming too much to conclude, that, as the mind ever gathers strength, like the body, by exercise, so in such an exercise it may in each have acquired the faculty to which they aspired, and that their collective studies may have led them to the discovery of new tracks and combinations of sentiment, totally different from the doctrines with which the learned of other nations are acquainted: doctrines, which however speculative and subtle, still, as they possess the advantage of being derived from a source so free from every adventitious mixture, may be equally founded in truth with the most simple of our own. But as they must differ, yet

[1] I give the *sloka* in the original:

Kaccid etac chrutam, Pārtha,
tvayai 'kāgrena cetasā
kaccid ajñāna saṃmohaḥ
praṇaṣtas te, Dhanaṃjaya?

The *Gita*: 18.72

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> more than the most abstruse of ours, from the common modes of thinking, so they will require consonant modes of expression, which it may be impossible to render by any known terms of science in our language, or even to make them intelligible by definition.

This shows that Warren Hastings was fully aware of the difficulties in the way of explaining Hinduism in terms of Western thought—which have never been overcome—but it also shows how far a rational mind of the eighteenth century was ready to go in meeting Hinduism. The next step was taken by the Romantic Movement which was ready to go much further.

The Romantic Movement was driven by a passion to extend the limits of the human mind by wandering as far as possible in time and space, and more especially by roaming in twilight areas of knowledge which fostered dreaming. Thus it was as natural for the Romantics to turn to India as to the Middle Ages. They did so all the more because at the end of the eighteenth century India was beginning to be known, and the knowledge about Hindu civilization was just sufficient to swell out the sails but not to put a ballast of cargo in the hold.

Thus Friedrich Schlegel could write: 'It is in the East that we must look for the supreme Romanticism.' His *Essay on the Language and Wisdom of the Hindus*, published in 1808, was compared by James Darmesteter to the manifesto on literature issued by Joachim Du Bellay on behalf of his fellow-poets of the Pléiade. Baron von Eckstein declared that for superior minds the literature of the East was going to be what Greek literature was for the scholars of the sixteenth century. J. J. Ampère noted that more and more the vast and mysterious East was soliciting and attracting all minds. Edgar Quinet gave the heading 'Oriental Renaissance' to a chapter in his book on religion.

All this fervour was worked up from very scanty information about the civilization and religion of the Hindus. It was only the researches of the Orientalists over the next one hundred years which were to make them properly known. But it was the early enthusiasm rather than the facts made available by the scholars which created the Western legend of Hindu spirituality. Anything less like Hindu spirituality than the ideas about it held by Hegel or Schopenhauer can hardly be conceived. But the legend persisted and, taken up in recent times by Hindu propagandists, it still colours the general conception of Hinduism. The exposition

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given by specialists, which is very competent so far as it goes, runs along a parallel channel into which only fellow-Orientalists go.

But the continuing influence of the legend has a different implication today from what it had in the last century. Then it did no harm. On the contrary, one might even say that it did some good by stimulating the European spiritual consciousness by its catalytic action. In the present enfeebled state of Western life and culture, the so-called Hindu spirituality has become a mirage to lure those Europeans who have become so de-vitalized that they feel the Western heritage of religion, ethics, and intellection as an unbearable burden.[1] They cannot see that if the esoteric wisdom attributed to the Hindus could do any good to anybody they themselves would not have been in the state of mental inertness from which they were aroused only by the Western ideas which came to India with the establishment of British rule. That they had survived even in that state as a community was due to the *real* Hindu religion, which is not what these Occidentals imagine it to be.

Besides the interest at the highest mental level, there was also, of course, throughout the West in the nineteenth century the attraction of Hindu charlatanry and mumbo-jumbo for the superstitious, who thought they could get from Hinduism what was not to be had from Christianity. This is comparable to the lure of the Cabala in the eighteenth century. This kind of attraction also continues, and has become more insidiously dangerous because it operates on all that is weak, unsettled, and morally debased in the West. After losing the mental stability and spiritual confidence which came from Christianity many people in the West are coming round to think that they can find a substitute in certain things in Hinduism, e.g., Yoga. Also, they have undermined repose and happiness in their daily life by a manner of conducting it which is almost devoid of sanity, and are taking recourse to the same Yoga and also to Vaishnavism, which is in no way better than taking to drugs. Worst of all, the contemporary sensuality in the whole of the West is seeking vicarious satisfaction in the erotic aspects of Hinduism, and this is encouraging the production of a literature which cannot be distinguished from pornography. Compared with the style of these works, even

[1] Aldous Huxley furnishes a pitiful example of this.

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Casanova's confirmed habit of employing words connected with religious worship like *autel*, *sanctuaire*, and *libation* is less unpleasant, for that was quite honestly blasphemous.

Any writer, more especially if he is a Hindu, will have to reckon with these Western demands in presenting Hinduism today. Some Hindu writers are actually writing to meet such expectations, each choosing which he would satisfy. Thus one ladles out Vedanta to the intellectually debilitated, another Yoga to the physically degenerate, and a third Tantra to the erotomaniac who has not the courage of his lechery. So, there is a good deal of deliberate misrepresentation of Hinduism. Yet it is not easy to do something different. An honest writer can, of course, ignore the dubious interests, and in any case he will not pander to them. But he cannot ignore the idealistic expectation, the sincere interest in Hinduism inspired by the Western religious sentiment, for by so doing he will puzzle many readers and also create emotional and intellectual resistance.

The notions about Hindu spirituality current in the West, though mythical, are too firmly established to be merely ignored or dismissed out of hand as false. They can be counteracted only by presenting a true view of Hindu spirituality, that is, the element in Hinduism which roughly corresponds to what is known as spirituality in the West. There is also another Western notion about Hinduism which must be dealt with. It is the idea that the profoundest part of Hinduism is an esoteric religious experience. This is wrong. Therefore the real nature of Hindu esotericism will also have to be explained. But the discussion of both is being reserved for the epilogue to the book. In this introduction only the open aspect and the basic function of Hinduism will be set forth.

Worldly Character of Hinduism

Hinduism differs fundamentally from Christianity in this, that for its followers it is not an alternative to the world, but primarily the means of supporting and improving their existence in it. Of course, as in all other religions, so in Hinduism there is belief in another world, in life after death, and in all the supra-mundane things which form the staple of every religious system. The Hindus also make a distinction between *this* world *(iha-loka)* and the *other* world *(para-loka)*, between things which belong to *here (aihika)*

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and those that belong to *there (pāratrika)*. They also speak of salvation *(moksha)*. But the unworldly aims of the religion when put against the worldly have hardly any weight.

As to the notion of salvation, it is wholly unreal and unattractive—a mere talking point, as indeed the verbiage about it shows. Salvation is never the object of the religious observances and worship of the Hindus. The main object is worldly prosperity, and this absorption in the world has made the doctrine of rebirth in it the most appealing and strongly held belief among all the notions put forward by them about existence after death. They so loved the world that they made the possibility of leaving it for good even after many cycles of birth as remote and difficult as possible.

Albert Schweitzer had the insight to perceive this, and said that Hinduism was not a religion of world negation. Actually, the religion is for the world, and there is no unworldliness in it. At the same time, the world is also for religion and the two cannot be separated. Therefore in Hindu society every worldly activity is under the control of religion, and everything religious is involved in the world.

This has not only been recognized, but emphasized by all Western writers who have learnt about it at first hand. For instance, W. J. Wilkins, a missionary who has written a very accurate book on Hinduism,[1] felt compelled to say in 1887:

> It may appear strange to some readers to see several subjects treated in this book which professes to be an account of the Hindu religion; but it must ever be borne in mind that, with the Hindu, religion is not a thing for times and seasons only, but professes to regulate his life in all its many relations. It orders ceremonies to be performed on behalf of a man before he is born, and gives instructions to his descendants, which they must follow in order that his happiness may be secured after death. It regulates the ceremonies attendant on his birth, his early training, his food, and its cooking, his style of dress and its manufacture, his employment, marriage, amusements—his whole life from before his birth, until generations after his death. Religion seeks to regulate not only the private life of the Hindu, but also his domestic and national relations, and no contingencies are possible for which it has not provided laws. To treat, then, of the ordinary life of the Hindu is to describe the Hindu religion.

[1] See p. 110 for particulars of the book. The observation is on p. vi.

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How Hinduism controls Hindu worldly life will be described at some length in its proper place later in the book.[1] What is called for in this preliminary indication of the character of the religion is an explanation of the mingling of religion and worldly matters. Before the coming of European ideas no Hindu perceived that the two were separate things. It was only when modern Hindus acquired the notion of a distinction between secular and religious matters from European theology and philosophy, that they thought an apology was necessary. But instead of remaining on the defensive they opened an offensive, declaring that the intermingling of religion and worldly life proved the superiority of Hindu culture over the European.

The Hindu Argument

The Europeans, the modern Hindu said, cut up life into fragments, because their *method* was analytical, whereas the Hindus preferred synthesis. So, the modern Hindu took up the stand that life must be treated as an indivisible whole, and must not be cut up to be labelled spiritual in one part and secular in another, or social, economic, cultural, political, and so on. This view was put forward aggressively against all European critics of Hinduism. Not even the *Action Française* was more assertive about its doctrine of *nationalisme intégrale* than were the neo-Hindus of the late nineteenth century about an integral Hinduism, and this apologia continued up to the second decade of the twentieth.

The inseparability of the secular from the religious was argued at the highest level by Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838–94), the great Bengali writer who can be regarded as the most powerful Indian mind of the nineteenth century. In an exposition of Hinduism, written in Bengali and published in 1888, he quoted a passage from an article of his own written in English.

> With other peoples [he wrote], religion is only a part of life; there are things religious, and there are things lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion. To other peoples, their relations to God and to the spiritual world are things sharply distinguished from their relations to man and to the temporal world. To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and his temporal life are incapable of being so distinguished. They form one compact and harmonious whole, to separate which

[1] See p. 186ff.

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into component parts is to break the entire fabric. All life to him was religion, and religion never received a name from him, because it never had for him an existence apart from all that had received a name. A department of thought which the people in whom it had its existence had thus failed to differentiate, has necessarily mixed itself inextricably with every other department of thought, and this is what makes it so difficult at the present day to erect it into a separate entity.

Holding such views, Chatterji was bound to consider any form of culture which was secular in the sense of being independent of religion as no true culture. He put forward this view in the same book in the form of a Platonic dialogue between a Guru (not of the type familiar in the West today) and his disciple:

Disciple So, I am to understand that the cultivation and exercise of all our bodily and mental faculties is religion, and not to do that is to be irreligious.

Teacher Religion is a very big subject. It cannot be summed up in a few words. But let us assume it is so.

D. Why, this is the European doctrine of culture!

T. Culture is not a European thing. It is the essence of Hinduism.

D. How can that be? There is no equivalent even of the word *culture* in any Indian language.

T. We run after the word, and not the thing, and that is why we have come to this pass. What do you think the four stages of life of the twice-born are?

D. A system of culture?

T. Indeed, and so much so that I doubt if European advocates of culture like your Matthew Arnold have the capacity to understand it. It is latent in the devotion of the wife to her husband as god, in the life of chastity and abstinence of the widow, in all the observances and injunctions of the routine of religion, in the rules of the Tantras, in Yoga. If ever I am able to make you understand this doctrine of culture, you will find that the purest and the most heart-winning spiritual message which is declared in the *Gita* is based on this notion of culture.

D. What you say does indeed make me eager to hear more about this doctrine of culture. But, so far as I can see, the European doctrine of culture seems to be atheistic. It might even be held that the Godless philosophy of Comte is based on that doctrine of culture.

T. Very true. The European doctrine of culture is Godless. Of course, I cannot be sure whether it is incomplete and immature

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> because of this, or Godless because it is incomplete and immature. But Hindus are men of faith and devotion, and therefore they have placed their doctrine of culture at the feet of God.
>
> (Translated from Bengali)

This would show that the new Hindu intellectual could hoist European rationalism with its own petard. But the argument was not of the Hinduism which was known through the ages. How foreign this mode of thinking was to the traditional Hindu can be judged from the fact that, in the Bengali book, Chatterji did not give a Bengali translation of the passage quoted from his English article, on the ground that its argument would not be understood by many of his Bengali readers. It is also significant that in the dialogue the word 'culture' and the phrases 'doctrine of culture' and 'system of culture' were in English, though embodied in a Bengali sentence. What Chatterji did was simply to turn round the garment of Hinduism to show that Hindu worldliness was really religious. This was scoring a debating point against the European critics of the religion, but not explaining its real nature.

Orthodox Doctrine and Behaviour

Such arguments were unnecessary when the Hindu world was not challenged by the European. Thus the most authoritative texts of Hinduism simply defined the position, and all Hindus accepted it. I shall quote only what the *Gita* says about the relationship between the gods and men, because in a book whose central doctrine is totally opposed to the Vedic ritualistic tradition, which is the basis of the worldliness of Hinduism, the unquestioning admission of the orthodox position is very significant. It says:

> After creating living beings with sacrifices the Creator (Prajapati) said of old: You will procreate yourselves through this—let this be the Cow of Wishes for you. With this you will prosper the gods and let the gods prosper you. From this mutual prospering you will attain the highest welfare. Prospered by sacrifices, the gods will give you the enjoyments you desire. Those who enjoy their gifts without giving them their dues are surely thieves.[1]

[1] Saha-yajñaḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā/ puro 'vāca Prajāpatiḥ: (The *Gita*: 3. 10–12)
anena prasaviṣyadhvam/ eṣa vo 'stv iṣṭa-Kāmadhuk.
Devān bhāvayatā 'nena/te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ
parasparam bhāvayantaḥ/ śreyaḥ param avāpsyatha.
Iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā/ dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ
tair dattān apradāyai 'bhyo/ yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ.

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Ritualistic worship is the practical discharge on the part of the Hindu of this contract of mutual help. For example, goats, sheep, and buffaloes are sacrificed to the Goddess Durga at her annual worship, and the goat is told: 'The goddess will be pleased to receive your flesh mixed with blood.' When the head has been cut off, it is taken to the image of the goddess with some blood, and the goddess is apostrophized: 'Thou who art fond of sacrificial meat, O great goddess! accept the blood of the beast with its flesh.' The same procedure is followed with the buffalo, and it is told before its head is cut off: '*Om!* O hero, forgive the pain which you will feel from the stroke of the scimitar, for you will attain heaven (literally, *Gandharva-loka*).'[1]

Since the goddess has been given her due, the worshipper (actually the priest on his behalf) feels entitled to utter this prayer:

> *Om!* Give me long life, give me fame, O goddess! give me good fortune. Give me sons, give me wealth, give me all things desirable.

She is also asked to give immunity from blindness, leprosy, poverty, diseases, great bereavements, loss of friends and relatives, and all distressing situations. Then comes the thanksgiving:

> *Om!* The man who has placed you on his head will have his kingdom well-founded, his good fortune will remain firm, ruling the world will be within his power. I am blessed that I have done my duty, my life has attained to its fulfilment because you, Great Goddess! have come to my dwelling.

After discharging all his obligations to the gods in order to get what he wants, the Hindu will offer renewed offerings when he has got it. For instance, if a child is ill the mother will take this vow: 'O Mother! Save my child and I will sacrifice a pair of goats to you.' And she will most conscientiously fulfil it if the child recovers. Gratitude is expressed to a god or goddess even if any kind of property is acquired by a man solely by his own efforts. A new house is not entered without a religious ceremony, and in very recent times I have seen offerings sent to the 'very awake' (*jāgrata*) Kali of Kalighat in Calcutta after the purchase of an Austin car. Hinduism is a social contract between two acquisitive communities.

[1] For the effect of the goat and buffalo sacrifice on the worshippers and spectators see my *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), pp. 65–7.

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The Hindus were also capable of feeling resentment against their gods if they failed to perform their part of the contract. The Abbé Dubois noticed this in the south, and there is no reason to doubt his account of observed facts. In his famous work on Hindu manners and customs he wrote: 'When they [the Hindus] are displeased with their idols they do not scruple to upbraid them fiercely to their faces, at the same time heaping the grossest insults upon them, with every outward gesture and sign of anger and resentment. In fact, there is no limit to the blasphemies, curses, and abuse which they hurl at them under the circumstances.' He added:

> If a person of high position has a grievance against the gods, he sometimes revenges himself by having the doors of their temples stopped up with thorns and brambles, so that no one can enter to worship or offer sacrifices.

After giving these particulars Dubois commented:

> As a matter of fact, their religious devotion increases or diminishes in proportion to the amount of profit they expect to make out of it, and it also depends on the amount of publicity surrounding them. Those deities who do not contribute towards the welfare of the votaries here below receive very careless and perfunctory worship.

However, it has to be pointed out that Dubois was writing about the Brahmins of the south of his times, when they were hardboiled, cynical, and arrogant. He himself quoted a Hindu proverb to explain their irreverence: 'A temple mouse fears not the gods.' Generally speaking, the Hindus blamed themselves instead of the gods, and assumed that if they had not got what they wanted that was due to some fault of their own not perceived by them.

The worldly orientation of the entire religious life of the Hindus can be seen in its manifold expressions, but it cannot be said that, according to their belief, the material and moral order of the universe is in any way maintained by their religion or their gods. What is clear is that the Hindu gods could give to their worshippers what the world contained, but had no part to play in maintaining the existence of the world, nor were they responsible for the moral behaviour of men. In fact, help from religion was sought for all purposes, moral or immoral. Religion and morality ran along parallel courses.

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Bankim Chandra Chatterji gave a very interesting illustration of this from his personal experience:

> We know of a landowner [he wrote in a Bengali article published in 1884] who is a Brahmin and a very strict Hindu. In winter as in summer he gets up very early in the morning and takes his bath [in cold water—it has to be added]. After that he performs his daily worship for many hours with the utmost scrupulousness. He feels as if he is stunned by a blow on the head if there is even a slight interruption of it. He takes only one vegetarian meal during the day and that in the afternoon. Then he attends to the business of his properties. At that time his mind becomes wholly intent on the problems of ruining one or other of his tenants, depriving an unprotected widow of all her possessions, cheating his creditors, securing false witnesses to send some innocent person to jail, or concocting evidence to win his cases, and his efforts in all these directions are successful. Yet we also know for certain that he is wholly sincere in his devotion to the gods and Brahmins and that there is no hypocrisy whatever in that. Even when faking a document he utters the name of Hari [i.e. Vishnu, the Preserver], and he believes that this will make the fraud effectual.

It should be remembered that Bankim Chandra Chatterji was also a magistrate of long experience and with a very distinguished record. But being the exponent of a new kind of Hinduism, he asked the question: Is this man a real Hindu? And he answered it with a 'No'. None the less, the landowner he described was a typical traditional Hindu. In India even thieves and robbers worshipped their special deity for success in their ventures.

This separation of morality from religion has, however, a long history behind it. There is clear evidence that in the earliest stage of the Hindu religion, order in the universe, both in its material and moral aspect, was in charge of the dual gods Mitra and Varuna. The name given to this order was *ṛta*, which meant 'straight', both literally and figuratively. But the idea had receded into the background even at the stage which the *Rig-Veda* stands for. Later Hindu mythology, too, gives instances of the intervention of Vishnu in successive crises for gods and men. The late legend of the ten incarnations of Vishnu embodies the idea of the dependence of the cosmos on one god for its preservation and survival. But Hindu mythology, as will be explained more fully later, was never any part of the Hindu religion as practised. So,

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in the fully developed form of Hinduism as religion, the role of the gods, even of the major ones, in preserving the cosmic order is never emphasized, though their capacity to give or withhold all desirable things in the world is always asserted.

The existence of the world, especially of moral order in it, without which even material order could not survive, was dependent on an abstract entity which was moral rather than religious. It was Dharma, which was certainly descended from the old notion of *ṛta*. Of course, in Hindu mythology the god of death, Yama, is the guardian of Dharma, and he is therefore called Dharma Raja, King of Dharma, corresponding roughly to the Greek god Hades. But this also existed as a purely mythological idea, and Dharma in its full ethical aspect never became concrete as an anthropomorphic god. The abstract Dharma became identified not only with order, but also with righteousness, and was thought of as a power which acted by itself without being associated with any god of the Hindu pantheon. Thus the moral life of the Hindus became detached from their religious activities and observances. But in Hinduism no aspect of life is fully separated from any other, and therefore, Dharma, too, formed part of a very wide and vague religious consciousness.

All this may create the impression that the intermingling of religion and worldliness in Hinduism is wholly sordid. Undoubtedly many of the motives behind the religious observances of the Hindus are so. But there is more to it, because all kinds of worldly prosperity have been given an aura of sanctification in Hinduism. Furthermore, it was not for monetary and other gains alone that the Hindus turned to religion. It supported their life in the world in every way, and conferred tangible as well as intangible benefits. What these were and are will be described in the book.

The Religion in Relation to Its Followers

The explanation for the intermingling of religion and worldly life still remains to be given. But to make that easier to understand, something more should be said about the relationship between the divine and the human order in Hinduism. It has been seen that it is based on a contract, which is at the bottom of the worldliness of the religion. But in this contract the two contracting parties are not on the same footing, because the worshippers are not wholly

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free. The Hindu's relationship with his gods contains an element of coercion, which is very much like that which exists between a modern democratic State and its citizens. The political position is that, though the citizens have the right to create the agents of the State, they have no power to create or remove the State itself or to check its exercise of power. In every way the State is an intangible and irremovable authority which is obeyed because it has created the psychological readiness to obey. In nothing is the power of the modern State seen to be more absolute than in the submission to its power to impose taxes, which no tyrant of the past ever possessed to such a degree. All that the people get from the State in return is the maintenance of conditions in which he can live securely, and, in addition, they can receive social benefits like unemployment allowances and old age pensions, as well as medical benefit. The Hindu also gets such things from his religion and obeys it.

But the Hindus never felt this coercion in any human sense. They not only spent money for religious purposes voluntarily, but actually regarded the acceptance of their gifts by the gods as a favour—*prasada*, pleasure of the god, as they called it. This feeling was all the stronger among them because the Hindu gods, in the forms in which they were worshipped for centuries, had no tyrannical, malevolent, or fearful character for their worshippers. No Hindu god or goddess, except a minor and local goddess of third rank, has been represented as pursuing any human being with the vindictiveness of Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite. Indra, the only god who is shown in Hindu mythology as a lecher seducing the wives of the sages, lost the status of a worshipped deity long before historic Hinduism appeared. Siva is the god of destruction in mythology, but in worship he is the god who guarantees welfare and safety, and is easily pleased. Kali, so terrifying in her image as killer of demons, is a mother full of love and mercy. What characterizes the god–man relationship in Hinduism is benignity on one side and devotion on the other.

Inseparability of the Natural and the Supernatural

The simple explanation of the worldliness of Hinduism is that for all Hindus their religion is a supernatural overlay on the natural world, and the two cannot be separated. Its ultimate derivation is

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from primitive life, in which the two mingle in every conceivable way. But in its Hindu version the primitive belief has come via the original Indo-European outlook, which also never distinguished religion from the rest of life. That was why neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any specific word for the whole complex of their religious beliefs, practices, and experiences.

The supernatural permeated the life of the Hindus and influenced all their activities so thoroughly that it became an additional environment of their existence. Moreover, this supernatural comprised not only their impersonal pantheism, their peculiar monotheism and their anthropomorphic polytheism, but also magic, auguries, and the like. In this they were both similar and dissimilar to the Greeks and Romans.

Originally, neither the Greeks nor the Romans made any distinction between religion and superstitition. The Greek word *deisidaimon* (employed in the superlative by way of praise by St Paul at Athens) at first meant one who fears the *daimones*, that is, fears the gods as they should be feared, and is therefore respectful of his religion and zealous in his practices. But later it acquired a pejorative meaning, which was equivalent to being superstitious in the modern sense. The case of the Romans is more interesting. They had two words *religio* and *superstitio*, from which the modern words in the European languages have descended. At first they overlapped. But from the first century B.C. the two drifted apart, and *superstitio* became pejorative.

The Hindus did not have any equivalent of the Greek word, nor of the two Latin words. Also, they did not develop any sense of there being two aspects to their religion, one religious and the other superstitious, for the simple reason that they never acquired the notion of superstition. But without having the words, they had an attitude towards all their religious observances which might be described by the Latin word *religio* in it old meaning. Derived from *legere* and not *ligare*, the word meant—to have scruples, hesitation, or diffidence vis-à-vis the gods or supernatural forces. In Latin the opposite of *religion* is *neglect*. That is to say, religion consists in not neglecting the promptings of scruples. For the Hindus these scruples did not come from inside, like those coming to the Greeks from what they called *aidos*, their equivalent of conscience, but from an awareness of a watch on their actions and behaviour from the outside, as if invisible beings all around were

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looking out for failure in being scrupulous, so as to punish any negligence. The Hindus have a word for the failure. It is *dosha*, which means offence or stumbling in a religious sense. Even when in their intellectual attitudes they had become philosophical, religion meant for them consciousness of the strength of scruples and abstaining from acts about which they had scruples.

Among the Hindus the feeling of awe in the presence of invisible powers, which is one of the elements of religiosity, came from their awareness of the powers immanent in the world in which they lived, who demanded scruples. Of course, this meant that, in the ultimate analysis, Hinduism was a very highly evolved form of animism, which made no distinction between a material and a spiritual world.

Sanctification of Worldliness

The worldliness in Hinduism did not also make the Hindus irreligious in the modern sense, because at the same time they sanctified worldly prosperity in a very striking way. There are two very curious facts to note about this sanctification. In the first place, the Hindus had no word for holiness. The Greek language had two words for complementary aspects of holiness, namely, *hieros* and *hagios*. Latin equally had two, namely, *sacer* and *sanctus*. But Sanskrit had none. Linguists have connected the Greek *hagios* with the Sanskrit verb *yaj-*, to sacrifice. The Latin *sacrificare* in its etymology means *to make sacred*; *yaj-* has no such association.[1] Yet the notion of the 'sacred' or 'sanctified' is present in every act of Hindu life. Conception, birth, eating, dressing, going on a journey, building a house, all have to be sanctified. In short, it might be said that Hinduism, in spite of its worldliness, has not merely seven sacraments like the Roman Church, but a whole series of them.

Secondly, the gods through whose cults worldly life is sanctified, have no sanctity by themselves. As seen in Hindu theogony and mythology, they are all human beings on a heroic scale, with all

[1] I am aware that the derivative adjective *Yajata*, which in the Vedas is often applied to the gods and which literally means 'those who are worthy of sacrifices', has been given the meaning of 'holy' or 'divine' in modern Sanskrit dictionaries. But I am unable to discover why. In any case, it is not a word in common use.

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the human failings in godly measure and also power, but no virtue. It is only when they are brought into relationship with man through the cults which are meant to sanctify worldly life, that they acquire sanctity or holiness, that is, godliness in the religious sense. This is true of all the gods of the great cults.

The sanctification of worldliness is best seen in the cult of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. In recent times her worship has become very mercenary, but in its typical form the worship of Lakshmi was never sordid. She was Sri, grace of the world, the embodiment of beauty in a sanctified form. Therefore the most gracious festival of the Hindus, the Dipavali (Dewali), or the festival of light, was specially hers. The notion of sanctified beauty covered not only its aesthetic expression, but also the moral. Thus a young girl who was lovable by reason of her character was always called Lakshmi, even though she might be plain. Even a good boy was called a Lakshmi boy.

The religious or sanctified complexion of worldly life of the Hindus is very clearly seen in the application to it of the adjectives of moral grading which are used by them to evaluate all phenomena. They traditionally recognize three moral attributes: *sattva* (purity, goodness, and repose in combination), *rajas* (majesty, power, splendour), and *tamas* (darkness, uncleanness, baseness). The worldly life which is commendable by reason of its affiliation with religion can have either the first quality or the second. The second quality of splendour is as legitimate in religion as the first, which implies abnegation. It might be added that Hindu women wear their most gorgeous clothes and valuable jewellery at religious festivals, as at weddings and other social occasions. Not only are these not considered to be opposed to the religious spirit, it is even unbecoming to be before a god or goddess on these occasions in everyday clothes.

Conclusion

To sum up, Hinduism in its fundamental aspect is a civilized amplification of the primitive man's way of living in the world by accepting the conditions which he believes are inexorably laid down by the supernatural spirits who really own and govern it. It is also an elaboration of the primitive man's corollary to the main proposition that by accepting the conditions it is possible to

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establish a relationship of mutual dependence which will be stable. In modern terms, the collaboration between man and the supernatural spirits might be called religious feudalism based on the principles of fealty, service, and protection.

But above this elemental aspect of Hinduism there is another which is not less fundamental. This has been created by the geographical environment and historical evolution of the Indo-Aryans. This process is not, however, unique, for it was seen among three other Indo-European ethnic groups, namely, the Romans, the Greeks, and the Persians. All the Indo-Europeans who moved out of their original habitat with cultures already crystallized, had to face the problem of adjusting their institutions and more especially religion which sustained their worldly life to the new environments. They did so in four different ways in Italy, Greece, Persia, and India, and brought into existence four distinct cultures. These were bound to differ in obedience to the particular conditions set by each environment.

The Greeks came to the eastern Mediterranean region where there already were highly developed cultures and religions. These modified the original features of their religion to such an extent that scholars dealing with the Greek religion in its developed form have not been able to recover all of them. But this transformation did not change the basically Indo-European character of the religion.

The Romans retained more of the original heritage through a very tenacious conservatism, combined with a certain degree of adaptability. They found nothing in Italy which could drastically modify their archaic religion, though they borrowed certain things from the Etruscans. The real impact of outsiders was felt by them when on account of their political expansion they came in contact, first, with Hellenism, and after that with the cultures and religions of Asia and Egypt. Syncretization with Hellenism was easy, and a good deal of it was assimilated into their old religion. But the more exotic religions were adopted as parallel cults. Thus the religion of the Roman empire corresponded to the organization of the empire itself. It became a heterogeneous religion for a heterogeneous empire, with a central religion which corresponded to the political imperium, and other religions as *federati*, so to speak.

The Persians shaped their religion in a different way, but that

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too was influenced by political circumstances. They did not find any religion in Persia which could disturb their Indo-European polytheism. But they had an internal religious revolution which did away with the polytheism. Whether this was due to the presence in adjacent areas to the west of the more or less exclusive monotheism of the Semites cannot be determined. In any case, the new monotheism became the national religion for the Iranians, and a means of retaining their identity in their multi-racial and multi-cultural empire, with its tolerance of all other religions in it.

The case of the Aryans in India was wholly different. In the first place, they became completely cut off from the polytheism of other Indo-Europeans not only by immense distances, but by the intervening monotheism of the Persians which was very assertive. On the other hand, they found nothing within India with which they could strengthen their culture in isolation. They had to face the difficult problem of surviving with their culture in an environment which was hostile in every way. For this they had to create a way of life which would serve multiple purposes: resist the enmity of the aboriginal inhabitants whom they looked upon as savages, as well as the temptation to fraternize with them; compensate for the decline of vitality inevitable in a tropical environment; check erosion of morale; and withstand the destructive impact of the environment on their institutions.

This security could not come from their social life, which itself had to be saved. It could also not come from political activity, because they were thoroughly incompetent in politics. In this they were wholly different from the Romans and the Persians, and even worse than the Greeks. There were no alternative secular ideals on which they could fall back. They had none. Indeed, in that age no human group had a secular pattern of life. Furthermore, they never developed any intellectual faculty except in dealing with religion, and that too was of a very special kind even in its own field.

These handicaps would have created serious difficulties in the way of social and cultural survival even in a favourable geographical environment. But the environment was wholly hostile, because in India nature in all its aspects was in arms against man. Therefore to win the battle against nature they had to seek the help of the supernatural in everything. A pattern of life had to

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be created in which the supernatural would be able to reinforce human strength.

This was done with an amazing thoroughness. The original Indo-European religion was developed in such a way as to become a strong and comprehensive way of life, covering every aspect of human existence. This was accomplished in part by internal development, forcing the old religion to a lush growth, and also by borrowing from outside which added new features to it. Naturally, in this effort to survive many experimental ways were taken which have remained blind alleys; certain aberrant lines were also taken which have not been discarded, but are only ways of escaping by avoiding the problems; nevertheless, a massive norm was also established which, by becoming Hinduism at its widest and most general, has become the framework of worldly life in India. It still sustains life at a level of confidence maintained by few religions in the world. Historically, the great achievement of the Hindu religion is that it has enabled Hindu society and culture to survive through vicissitudes which have destroyed other societies and cultures contemporaneous with it.

In addition, the religion has created what must be regarded as the true nationalism of the country. It is this which gives appropriateness to the name of *Hinduism*, which foreigners have given to the religion of the Indo-Aryans, for whom their religion was nameless. The word *Hindu* was originally only a geographical term, employed by the Persians to designate the inhabitants of the country which is known to the outside world as India. And the words 'India' and 'Indian' are only Greek and Latin adaptations from the Persian word. But since the inhabitants could never in any aspect of their life be separated from their religion the word 'Hindu' became religious, and the national identity became the same as adherence to a religion. The fusion is the only real guarantee behind the national identity of Indians. If Hinduism disappears at any time, the inhabitants of India will, unless they acquire identities derived from other religions like Islam or Christianity, cease to have any distinctive identity.

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PART ONE

HISTORICAL

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Chapter One

HISTORY OF HINDUISM: ITS METHODOLOGY

ANY writer wishing to give an account of the historical evolution of Hinduism must begin by taking the reader into his confidence about the method he is following in order to do this. If he does not, he would be guilty of practising something very much like deception by trying to pass off as genuine history what at best can only be a speculative reconstruction, and that too of decreasing validity as he goes backwards. Indeed, in strict honesty, he should be ready to confess that a full and continuous history of the religion cannot be written at all. There can be no doubt that the origins of Hinduism go back to a very distant past. But nothing is known about what it was like in practice in India until the beginning of the Christian era, and even for about five hundred years after that our knowledge of it is fragmentary. It has to be frankly recognized that it is not possible to give a continuous account of the development of Hinduism from its beginnings to its present form.

Nevertheless, a particular kind of history of the religion has been offered by almost every writer who has dealt with it. In constructing it these writers have depended on the texts of Hinduism, which are very numerous. They have analysed the character of the dogmas, myths, and rituals in the various texts and on the basis of the analysis divided them into homogeneous blocs. These, they have placed in a relative chronological sequence like archaeological strata, and after that even gone forward to assign absolute dates to the stages. The result has been the erection of a conventional history of Hinduism, divided nowadays into three broad but distinct stages, namely, the Vedic, the ancient, and the modern.

In view of the existence of this kind of history, it would be odd if no attempt was made in this book to give an account of the evolution of the religion. But a new version of it would not be justified unless that aimed at describing a process which could be presumed to have taken place in actual fact. However, this calls

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for a wholly different method. What that can and should be cannot be explained without first examining the method so far adopted because reliance on it has prevented scholars from seeing that there was an alternative one whose soundness was obvious.

The historical approach to Hinduism has been of two kinds—one with an apologetic motivation, and the other objective and intellectual. The first made its appearance only in the nineteenth century among the Hindus themselves under the impact of European learning. Before that the Hindus had never thought of justifying their religion, nor considered it historically. They accepted it as something which had always been what it was and will be for evermore. They regarded their religion as an integral part of a complete way of life and interwoven with it. This way of life, they called the *Sanatana Dharma*—the established, permanent, and eternal way of life.

Therefore they submitted to their religion as an indivisible whole, however varied and even incongruous its doctrines, injunctions, and rituals might be. Actually, in ancient times the Hindus were so indifferent to the discrepancies that they were able to attribute most of their basic texts to one legendary author, the sage Vyasa. According to Hindu traditions he was the author of the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, and of the philosophical treatise, the *Brahmasutra*. He could not be regarded as the author of the Vedas as well only because they were considered to have been revealed and not composed by any human being. So he was described only as the editor of the Vedas, and given the title of Veda-Vyasa, the arranger of the Vedas.

The impact of Western thought and scholarship, which brought the historical attitude to modern educated Hindus, made it impossible for them to go on regarding all their religious texts, doctrines, and practices as an integral whole. Moreover, Christian religious notions brought to them the idea, utterly foreign to Hinduism, that monotheism and polytheism were mutually exclusive, and also its corollary that polytheism was a corruption of religion. Thus in nineteenth-century India the historical attitude and the urge for religious reform became fused.

Between them they made the reformers give up what might be called Hindu 'fundamentalism' and formulate a cut-and-dried historical view of the religion. This was partly inspired by the work of European scholars on the Vedic texts and partly by the

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basic monotheism of the Hindus themselves. Simply stated, the reforming view held that originally Hinduism was a pure monotheistic religion, whose true doctrines were to be found in the Upanishads, but that after being swamped by Buddhism, it reappeared in the seventh or eighth century A.D. in a grossly polytheistic form. This, they called Puranic Hinduism.

This view of Hinduism, which was no more sound history than the orthodox view, has become outmoded even among the Hindus, for religious reformation is no longer a living cause with them. In its place those modern Hindus who take an intellectual interest in their religion have become disciples of the Western specialists on Hinduism. Naturally, those Hindus who write on their religion have also adopted the method of the Western scholars. Therefore it is this method which has to be examined.

It has been mentioned that the history of Hinduism has been divided by these scholars into three stages, the Vedic, ancient, and modern. Of their descriptions of these, only that of the modern stage can be said to conform to any historical reality, for it has been compiled mostly from direct observation. But modern Hinduism has never appealed to academic scholars. They have concerned themselves with the older forms, and left the description of the last stage to the Christian missionaries or British administrators.

In giving their description of Hinduism as well as for reconstructing the history of the religion these scholars have depended almost wholly on the texts. It is this dependence which is open to objection. On the face of it, there would seem to be every reason to draw on them, and since their volume is immense to neglect them would be to deprive oneself of the most ample body of source material. But in this matter the Hindu texts differ materially from the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic scriptures, which furnish the basis both of devotion and practice in these religions.

Not so in Hinduism. A Hindu religious text may or may not be the basis of practice or even faith. Whether it is, has to be proved, not merely by the existence and survival of the text, but by independent evidence as to its use. I shall give two instances to illustrate this.

The *Rig-Veda* is regarded as the original revealed source of their religion by all Hindus. It is still recited with the strictest conformity with the rules for doing so. But it has no connection with any practised cult. Even in the age which the *Mahabharata* describes,

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it had become difficult to understand, as certain statements in it indicate. Apart from the epic itself, the *Hari-Vamsa*, which is a Vaishnava text interpolated in it, compares frogs croaking together in the rainy season to pious Brahmins reciting the *Rig-Veda* with their disciples. The writer of the *Hari-Vamsa* could not be accused of blasphemy because even the *Rig-Veda* itself has this simile.

The position of the *Gita* is even more striking. It is fervently read by devout Hindus every day and is recited at religious ceremonies, especially at those connected with death. There is no text, even among those which constitute the *Sruti* or the corpus of revealed scriptures, which is held in greater veneration. None the less, its specific doctrines have no place in the practice of Vaishnavism as it has been ever since it became a popular cult. Although such a statement would sound paradoxical I would say that the more highly regarded a text is in theory the less it is followed in practice.

But after assuming that the texts do reflect practice the scholars have gone forward to base their account of the historical development of Hinduism on them by arranging them, as has already been said, in a chronological sequence, both relative and absolute. This is wholly unsound because not one of these texts, unless it is very late, i.e. later than the twelfth century A.D., can be assigned to a definite date. No serious writer on ancient Indian history has ever disputed this fact.

Yet there is a conventional chronology of the texts, even the most ancient. I shall illustrate the method by which it has been arrived at with the same two examples, namely, the *Rig-Veda* and the *Gita*. The *Rig-Veda* is rightly considered as the *terminus a quo* of Hinduism. The only external evidence for placing it in a particular age is linguistic. The Sanskrit in which it is written is akin to the Old Persian of the *Gatha* portion of the *Avesta*, which is generally supposed to go back to the early part of the sixth century B.C. But no one dreams of bringing down the date of its composition so low. That is not unreasonable, because if Buddha lived in the sixth century the Vedas could not have been composed in the same age. But they could conjecturally be placed two or three hundred years earlier without disregarding the linguistic evidence, for dialects of the Gathic type might have been current over that space of time. But even 800 B.C. is not regarded as a probable date of the *Rig-*

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Veda. At first European scholars were inclined to fix upon 2000 B.C. rather than 1000 B.C. as the approximate date of the book. Then they established the convention of assigning it to any time between 1500 B.C. to 1200 B.C., and this still holds good. These dates are, of course, scoffed at by orthodox Hindus, for whom the composition or revelation of the Vedas even a million years ago is not too fanciful. Even some European scholars have suggested 4000 B.C. as the date of the *Rig-Veda* on the strength of certain astronomical data found in it. This hypothesis, however, has not found acceptance.

But the conventional date of 1500–1200 B.C. for it is also pure hypothesis, for which there is no evidence whatever. It has been assumed on the basis of another hypothetical date, that of the arrival of the Aryans in India. No archaeological data have been found in India to fix the date of this event, and the only way of introducing some certainty into this speculation is to correlate the coming of the Aryans into India with the Aryanization of Iran, for the Indo-Aryans must have been a branch of the Iranian Aryans, and they must have separated from their kinsmen after living for a period of time in Persia. Even fifty years ago very little was known about the migration of the Aryans to that country, but recent archaeological excavations have made it possible to suggest an approximate date, which is around 1000 B.C. or a little later.

But usually this correlation is not given much weight, and the Sanskritists and historians of India have stuck to their date of 1500–1200 B.C., which they had adopted before the recent archaeological excavations in Iran. Why this particular date was preferred can only be explained by supposing that even Western scholars dealing with India were unconsciously swayed by the fantastic chronology of the Hindus, but being incapable of swallowing that camel, selected instead a smaller animal which would more easily go down their throat. Moreover, the German Romantic movement, as has been pointed out, influenced Indology, and its tendency was to regard the civilization of the Hindus as the oldest civilization, because nothing was then known of the historic existence of the old Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations. Altogether, all Indologists *a priori* feel shy of assigning late dates to anything Hindu.

Since the *Rig-Veda* is the earliest text of Hinduism, its exact date would not have mattered if that had not become the fixed point

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from which to calculate the dates of later texts in terms of absolute chronology. This has been done by means of guesswork as to the length of time which was needed to transform the older notions into the new, for instance, to change Vedic religious feeling into Upanishadic feeling.

For the later texts another fixed point was adopted, and it still remains the basis of the relative as well as absolute chronology of many important texts. This is the date of Buddha. It is generally accepted that Buddha lived between *c.* 550 B.C. and 480 B.C. and therefore Hindu texts are assigned to dates before or after him according as these, in the opinion of the scholars, show or do not show knowledge of Buddhism. The fallacy of this procedure lies in two assumptions: first, that the ideas which seem to be Buddhistic could not have existed as Hindu ideas before the appearance of Buddhism; and, secondly, that all Buddhist ideas go back to Buddha—nobody makes such an assumption in respect of Zarathustra, Confucius, Lao-tzu, or Christ.

To turn now to the *Gita*. S. N. Das-Gupta, the author of the most exhaustive history of Hindu philosophy, states in volume 2 of his work (1932) that the *Gita* should be assigned to times before Buddha because it does not show any knowledge of Buddhism. On the contrary, R. C. Zaehner in his edition of the treatise (1969) says: 'It seems certain, however, that it was written later than the classical Upanishads with the possible exception of the *Maitri* and that it is post-Buddhistic.' K. N. Upadhyaya, who in his *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita* (1971) offers the most thorough discussion of the date of the *Gita*, says on his part: 'We can reasonably conclude that the *Bhagavadgita* was composed sometime between the fifth and fourth century B.C., when the growing impact of Buddhism besides that of the Upanishads had made it essential for the orthodox tradition to resuscitate itself and vindicate its position.' It is not possible to imagine a greater incomprehension of the religious message of the *Gita* than to regard it, as this writer does, as a reassertion of Brahmanic orthodoxy against the doctrines of the Upanishads and of Buddhism.

The most surprising part of the methodology of the scholars when dealing with Hindu texts is the monotonous lament about the impossibility of fixing the dates of their composition, rounded off by attributions to a definite date or a period of time which is either a century or even many centuries. And this is done without

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giving any reason whatever. Zaehner in his edition already referred to observed: 'As with almost every major text in India, no firm date can be assigned to the *Gita*.' But he concluded his brief discussion of its date by declaring: 'One would not be far wrong if one dated it at some time between the fifth and second century B.C.' Why these centuries and these only? Radhakrishnan also admits the difficulty of assigning a date to the book, but he too does sc. 'Its date,' he says, 'may be assigned to the fifth century B.C.'

No less remarkable are the observations of Franklin Edgerton on this question. He has edited the *Gita* for the Harvard Oriental Series, and his is the most authoritative edition (1944) of the book published so far. In it he writes:

> We do not know its author's name (indeed, almost all the early literature of India is anonymous). Nor can we date it with any accuracy; all that we can say is that it was probably composed before the beginning of our era, but not more than a few centuries before it. We do know this: it was preceded by a long literary and intellectual activity, covering perhaps a thousand years or even more, and reaching back to the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* itself, the oldest monument of Hindu literature.
>
> (F. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gita*, vol. 2 (39th of the series), p. 5.)

The point to note is that one thousand years of speculation on religious matters is postulated on the basis of the very texts which as every Sanskritist confesses, cannot be dated. Coming from so eminent a Sanskritist as Edgerton, such statements justify my remark that Western Orientalists have succumbed to Hindu chronological fantasies. They dare not proclaim themselves even as agnostics.

In the absence of external evidence, the main reliance of the scholars for establishing the date of the texts has been on a comparison of ideas. Now, to try to fix the date of one idea by noting its similarity or dissimilarity to another idea whose date itself has not been established by any kind of evidence, is a procedure whose unsoundness need not be pointed out. Of course, in the light of the conclusions of the science of Comparative Religion, which includes the study of primitive religions, it can be said that certain religious notions are simpler or cruder than others, and by this sort of evaluation they can also be placed in a chronological sequence. But it would be a mistake to make chronology dependent on qualitative analysis in every case. A simple idea is not

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necessarily older than a complex idea, and what it may lead to if this relationship is assumed in every case may be illustrated by an example from recent Indian history. If the religious ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, which were put in writing by him after 1914, were taken by themselves and compared with the ideas of Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu reformer who died in 1902, the conclusion would be irresistible that Gandhi lived many centuries before Vivekananda, and was probably a contemporary of Kabir, Tulsidas, or Tukaram.

The comparative method would at best permit the formulation of a taxonomy, so to speak, of religious notions, and extended to Hindu ideas it would do the same thing within a smaller field. But to base chronology on it would be unsound as a method when independent historical evidence does not prove the currency of the idea or ideas in a particular age. In the case of Hinduism such a procedure would be more unsound still because in Hinduism very crude practices have always remained current side by side with what might be described as the highest type of religious experience. Yet the comparative method has been employed not only to establish the chronology of the beliefs and practices, but even to fix the dates of the texts. The assumption seems to have been that ten uncertainties, unlike zeros, add up to one or even more dogmatic certainties.

If this is the state of the chronology of the religious books, that of the legal and literary works is no better. The books of sacred law which are collectively known as the *Dharma Sastra* are very large in number and they have been studied thoroughly down to very recent times by a special class of Hindu learned men known as Smartas. These books are the sources of Hindu law, and their injunctions are binding on all Hindus in regard to moral and social conduct. From the beginnings of their rule the British in India became aware of their prestige and authority, and they also adopted them as the source of Hindu civil law as administered by their courts. The first compilation of rules from the *Dharma Sastra* in English was made by N. B. Halhead with the help of many Hindu pundits and printed in London in 1776. But the books were all regarded as of equal authority, and no attention was paid to their dates, though attribution to a legendary sage added to the authority of a particular treatise.

The historical approach to them was left, as in the case of the

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religious books. to modern scholars, and the same method was applied by them to date the legal treatises. Generally, however, very early dates were not assigned to them, except to those written in archaic Sanskrit. Recently, a noted Indian scholar, P. V. Kane, has published an elaborate work in five volumes entitled *The History of Dharma Sastra.*[1] But it is really an epitome of Hindu sacred law, and not a history. All that Kane has to say about chronology is this: 'The important question is to find out when formal treatises on *dharma* began to be composed. It is not possible to answer this question.' Nevertheless, he goes on in the manner made familiar by the historians of Hinduism to suggest speculative dates without giving any reason. He says that some of the older *Dharma Sastras* might go back to a period between 600 B.C. and 300 B.C., and by the second century B.C. they had attained a position of supreme authority on the conduct of all Hindus. Such opinions do not take the discussion of the chronology of the Hindu legal treatises very far.

The case with Sanskrit secular literature, i.e. the whole body of poetry, drama, and stories, is somewhat better, because Western historians of this literature and their Hindu disciples have not been under any emotional compulsion to adopt fanciful dates. Sanskrit secular literature is also large in volume, though not as large as the sacred literature. The largest work is, of course, the epic *Mahabharata*, and after that comes the *Ramayana*. These two are quasi-religious, especially the *Mahabharata*, and therefore in dating them the religious precedent has been followed. But with remarkable courage Western scholars have refused to place Sanskrit literature properly so called before the fifth century after Christ.

But none of these works can be dated accurately or for that matter even approximately. The time when the greatest Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, flourished cannot be determined. He has been placed in the first century B.C. as well as the seventh century A.D., and two hundred years of discussion has not resulted in an agreed date. The only dependable chronological fact about him is a reference in an inscription of the seventh century. The same uncertainty exists about the date of the next great poet, Bhavabhuti. He is supposed to have lived in the eighth century on the strength

[1] This work, originally published from 1930 to 1962, is now being revised, and the first revised volume came out in 1968.

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of a reference in a late historical work in Sanskrit. The dates of the other well-known poets, too, are uncertain. The only writer in classical Sanskrit whose date is certain is Banabhatta, the author of *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari*, and this is due to his connection with the historical king Harsha. The relative dates of the poets have been established on the basis of their references to one another.

Since with a small number of exceptions the Hindu religious texts are in classical Sanskrit, as also are the two epics, the chronological discussion about them could have been placed on firmer ground if we knew when this form of Sanskrit gained currency. But here, too, the scholars have adopted the method of fixing one date by relating it to another conjectural date. In fact, the history of classical Sanskrit, so far as it has been written, has been dealt with very casually. It has been assumed that this form of Sanskrit must be contemporaneous with the most authoritative grammar of the language, namely, that attributed to Panini, whose date is supposed to be the fifth century B.C.

It is perfectly logical to assume that an elaborate grammar of a language must be of the same age as the language itself in its fully developed form. But it is not logical to determine the age of a language on the strength of the hypothetical date of its grammar, instead of fixing the date of the grammar itself by first establishing the existence of the language by independent evidence. The date of the fifth century for Panini faces the student of classical Sanskrit with the fact that at least seven centuries lie between the composition of an elaborate grammar of the language and its expression in literature. This fact can be got round only by taking back the whole of classical Sanskrit literature to the supposed date of Panini, which no scholar has ventured to do. Why was the Paninian grammar written if not for helping composition in classical Sanskrit? It would seem that the whole question of the relationship between the grammar and literary composition in this form of Sanskrit will have to be examined afresh. Actually, the date of Panini had been fixed partly by assuming hypothetical dates for Katyayana and Patanjali, the two commentators on his grammar.

Yet it was possible to arrive at greater certainty about the appearance and general use of classical Sanskrit by other means: first, by giving proper consideration to its character; and, secondly,

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by making use of epigraphic data. No Sanskritist disputes the proposition that classical Sanskrit was never a naturally spoken language, but a made up or synthetic language adopted for a special purpose. This is implied by its very name, *Samskṛta*, which means 'put together', 'artificially made', 'perfected', or 'refined'. It was primarily a written literary language, but was also used as a spoken language by the learned or educated elements in Hindu society for pan-Indian religious, political, and cultural communication.

On the other hand, the language which was colloquial among the educated and the only language spoken by the unlearned even in the higher classes of Hindu society was known as Prakrit, the name itself meaning 'natural' and by extension 'popular'. In all Sanskrit plays even queens speak only in Prakrit, and the conversation between a king and his consort is bilingual. The literary convention of making common people speak in Prakrit should be linked with the fact that all the early Buddhist texts are in a particular form of Prakrit, namely, Pali.

The mere fact that such an artificial language was created would suggest what it was meant to do and why it became necessary. There can be no doubt that it was meant to neutralize the effect of the natural linguistic evolution of the Indo-Aryans which threatened to destroy the unity of their community and culture. To put the matter more explicitly, the linguistic evolution brought into existence different dialects in different regions of India and as time passed the differences became so great that the inhabitants of one region could not understand the spoken language of another region. It was to re-establish the original intelligibility that classical Sanskrit was created. It succeeded in maintaining the unity of the Hindus at the highest cultural level.

Epigraphic data enable us to see this process at work and furthermore to determine when it began and was completed. Naturally, a fairly long period of time was needed. The earliest epigraphic evidence on languages employed in India comes from the inscriptions of Asoka, which were inscribed in the third century B.C. and are found all over the Indian subcontinent from the borders of Afghanistan in the north to Mysore in the south, and from Orissa in the east to Kathiawar in the west. The language of all these inscriptions is a particular kind of Prakrit. It would not have been used unless it was understood and in common use all over

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India. Its employment in this way also suggests that India was more homogeneous in language in the third century B.C. than in any subsequent age.

Asokan inscriptions have a vital bearing on the history of classical Sanskrit. It is inconceivable that this language could have been in general use or spoken by a considerable number of people and yet not even one Asokan inscription has been inscribed in it. The only argument which can be put forward against this conclusion is that Asoka was preaching Buddhism or at least Buddhistic ethics to the masses and so he did not see the necessity of putting his message in the language of learned and cultured Hindus. But this argument cannot be admitted as valid for two reasons: first, when Sanskrit began to be widely used the Buddhists employed it like the Hindus. Indeed, among the extant literary works in classical Sanskrit Asvaghosha's life of Buddha might be the very first. Secondly, Asoka himself showed the utmost anxiety that his teaching should be understood by all classes of his subjects, and over the whole of his dominions.

The care taken by him to make his message intelligible to all can be judged from the conformity to local pronunciation and script in inscribing the same Magadhan texts in the different regions of India. For instance, in the word *Raja* the consonant *r* is used only in the west, whereas the softer *l* is used in the east. Again, in the extreme north-west the script of the inscriptions is not the Brahmi, which is written from left to right, but Kharoshthi, which follows the right-to-left mode of the Middle East and is also more cursive.

Even more remarkable is the fact, which has only been recently discovered, that for those people who at the time lived in Afghanistan, his message was given in Greek as well as Aramaic. One of the Greek inscriptions is a translation of the Kalinga Edict, and the Greek of the inscriptions is not inferior in style to the classical Greek of Greek literature. In such circumstances neglect of Sanskrit by Asoka, if the language was widely used, would be contrary to all his practice. So, the absence of Sanskrit in his inscriptions should be taken to indicate that it was not in general use in his time.

Coming to the next stage, classical Sanskrit does not appear in inscriptions for some two centuries after Asoka. In certain inscriptions of the first century B.C. a few words are in Sanskrit, and

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one inscription found in the region of Ayodhya is in that language. In fact, this is the first inscription in Sanskrit. Since it mentions the sixth successor of Pushyamitra Sunga it has been placed in the first century B.C.

Employment of classical Sanskrit in its fully developed form is first attested by an inscription dating from the year 72 of the Saka era, this being equivalent to A.D. 150. It records the repair of a dam originally built by Chandragupta Maurya, and also contains a panegyric in verse which can be regarded as the first literary composition in classical Sanskrit. It is at Girnar in Kathiawar, and was inscribed by Rudradamana, the Saka Satrap of Ujjayini, on the same rock on which the Fourteen Rock Edicts of Asoka were also found. It is significant that Rudradamana employed classical Sanskrit in a region where about four hundred years before him Asoka had used only Prakrit. This definitely proves that in the second century A.D. Sanskrit was replacing the dialects. Even so the language did not replace Prakrit everywhere. It continued to be used in inscriptions for something like one hundred years or even more after this date. But from the fifth century classical Sanskrit is seen to be the dominant language in the inscriptions.

These facts would justify certain conjectures regarding the origin and use of classical Sanskrit, and nothing but conjecture is possible. It may be assumed that soon after their arrival in India the Aryans relegated Vedic Sanskrit and its modified forms to sacerdotal use alone. Thus for that purpose it had to be kept alive with effort. The meticulous treatises on Vedic phonetics and metres suggest that the old language could no longer be pronounced naturally, and those who recited them had to be taught the sounds and rhythms of the language with great care. This was very important; in fact, imperative because being in one aspect magical incantations, the hymns and formulas had to be vocalized correctly in order to be effectual. The relationship between this Sanskrit in sacerdotal use and the language employed in general life in the centuries before the Christian era might be compared to that which subsisted between Hebrew and Aramaic among the Jews in Palestine in the age of Jesus.

But while this old Sanskrit continued to be taught and read for its specialized purpose, the spoken language seems to have been a more or less uniform dialect all over Aryanized India. This

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uniformity was likely to continue so long as the memory of expansion from the central region of Indo-Aryan life remained living. But with the consolidation of the settlements in the different regions variations in the common dialect were bound to appear. The resultant unintelligibility, as has been stated above, led to the creation of Sanskrit for maintaining the uniformity of culture and religion. The process must have been conscious.

The new Sanskrit may have been created by expanding the archaic Sanskrit of the religious texts and also by a phonetic and orthographical upgrading of the words in Prakrit. This would not have presented a difficult problem to the ancient Hindus because in order to study the Vedas they had already created an advanced phonology. Of such an enterprise modern Hebrew furnishes a well-known historical example. By the fifth century A.D. this newly created language became the standard language of the Hindus for their highest cultural expression. It might be added that classical Sanskrit served this purpose among orthodox Hindus, who would not employ English or Persian, down to the beginning of the twentieth century.

If this conjectural reconstruction of the history of classical Sanskrit has any validity it would have clear implications for the chronology of the Hindu religious texts, because with the exception of the Vedas and their ancillary treatises, they are all in classical Sanskrit. Therefore in their present form none of them can be earlier than the fourth century A.D. This would apply to the Upanishads as well, with perhaps two exceptions. It would follow from this that they cannot be drawn upon to write a history of Hinduism or even to describe its practices before the time of their redaction in their extant form. It would be risky to trace the evolution of Hindu beliefs and practices with their help even over the succeeding centuries because their exact chronological relationship cannot be determined.

Of course, the lateness of the extant texts does not mean that the dogmas and practices which are found in them are all equally late. On the contrary, many of them must have been current for many centuries before the final compilation of the books. But the difficulty is to ascertain what is old and what is new in them. As has already been pointed out, ideological analysis cannot bring greater certainty into the chronological speculation. Therefore dependence on the texts for writing a history of Hinduism has

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to be given up. But the data found in them can be utilized to fill out a chronological outline established by dependable historical evidence.

This I have sought and found in five classes of sources, which are also those utilized for writing the political history of ancient India. These are the following: (1) inscriptions; (2) art objects; (3) religious buildings; (4) accounts of foreign travellers; and (5) works of secular Sanskrit literature.

The inclusion of classical Sanskrit secular literature among the historical sources for writing about Hinduism may appear surprising after what I have said about the uncertainty over the dates of the literary works. But they can prove two things: first, the actual practice of a cult, for if a writer describes a religious ceremony it can be assumed that it was performed in the age with which he is dealing; secondly, that all the practices mentioned by these writers as current may be placed in a period beginning from the fifth or sixth century A.D. Even this would be a gain.

I have collected what information about the religious life of the Hindus is to be found in these sources. Furthermore, since they are or can be correctly dated I have constructed a chronological framework of Hinduism with the help of these data. However, one very important fact has to be kept in mind about these sources. None of them go back to an age earlier than the third century B.C. or the end of the century before that. What implication this has for a history of Hinduism will be discussed later. For the present I have to summarize the information found in the sources. This is done in the next chapter.

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Chapter Two

HISTORICAL DATA ABOUT HINDUISM

IN this chapter I shall summarize the information on the religious beliefs, cults, and rituals of the Hindus which can be gathered or just gleaned from the classes of evidence mentioned at the end of the previous chapter. But in doing so I shall not go beyond the seventh century of the Christian era except in special cases, because by that time the general character of the religion seems to have been established, and most of its major features as seen in recent times had made their appearance.

Epigraphic Data

Of all the kinds of evidence which establish the actual existence of Hindu cults, beliefs, and practices, the most dependable is that provided by the inscriptions, whose dates are in many cases given, and even when not, can be approximately determined by the style of the script. What the inscriptions prove with absolute certainty is that every Hindu belief or practice must have appeared before the date of the inscription in which it is mentioned.

As it happens, the only evidence which establishes any kind of antiquity for the Hindu gods, as a matter of certainty and not mere supposition, is epigraphic. It has, however, been found, not in India but in Asia Minor. The reference is in a tablet in Hittite cuneiform and written in the Akkadian language, discovered at Boghazköy. The document is an adjunct to a treaty between the Hittite king Suppiluliuma and his son-in-law, the Mitannian king Kurtiwaza, and it contains a long list of the gods of the peoples who were parties to it. The date of the tablet must be some year within the reign of Suppiluliuma, which according to K. Bittel extended from 1370 B.C. to 1335 B.C.

The gods are invoked to witness the conclusion of the treaty and guarantee its observance. The gods of the Mitannians are named in these forms: *Mi-it-ra*, *U-ru-ua-na*, *In-da-ra*, and *Na-sa-at-ti-ia-an-na*. It is evident that these names correspond to Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and Nasatyau of the Vedic pantheon. The following anathema is also pronounced against the Mitannians: 'If you, Kurti-

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waza, the prince, and (you) the sons of the Hurri country do not fulfil the words of the treaty may the gods, the lords of earth, blot you out, you (Kurtiwaza) and (you) the Hurri men together with your country, your wives, and all that you have.'[1]

There is also a close linguistic affinity between the Mitannians and the Indo-Aryans in respect of language, and its evidence is to be found in four tablets in cuneiform, which contain the so-called 'Horse Treatise' by a Mitannian named Kikkuli. These, too, were found at Boghazköy. The Treatise contains words in a number of languages, and the following are akin to Sanskrit: *Aika-vartana* (= *Ekavartana* in S., meaning one turn), *Triu-vartana* (= *Tryavartana* in S., meaning three turns), *Panza-vartana* (= *Panchavartana* in S., meaning five turns), *Sapta-vartana* (= *Saptavartana* in S., meaning seven turns), *Nau-vartana* (= *Nava-vartana* in S., meaning nine turns); also *Asua* (= *Asva* in S., meaning horse).[2]

The significance of the theogonic and linguistic data furnished by these tablets, scanty as they are, has been discussed by many distinguished scholars in all the connected fields with meticulous erudition, and as is usual among scholars working on very insufficient data they have rejected one another's conclusions with fierce intolerance. The point at issue is whether the analogies are to be accepted as indicating a direct ethnic, religious, and linguistic connection between the Mitannians and the Indo-Aryans, or merely a distant collateral relationship.

To put it more explicitly, the question is whether the gods mentioned in the Boghazköy inscriptions are merely proto-Aryan or later and identical with the Indo-Aryan gods of similar names who are found in the *Rig-Veda*, but who first made their appearance in history in upper Mesopotamia. The issue is the same with the linguistic analogies.[3]

[1] For the original document see *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy* (1916–68). Translation by A. Goetze is in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd edition (1969), p. 205.

[2] For the 'Horse Treatise' see *Hippologica Hethitica* by Annelies Kammenhuber (1961).

[3] The arguments on both sides have been summarized in an article entitled 'The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties' by Paul Thieme of Tübingen in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 80 (1960), pp. 301–17. Thieme inclines to the view that the gods were Indic. The same view is taken by R. Hauschild in *Über die frühesten Arier im Alten Orient* (1962).

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The dispute is, however, too finespun. It is obvious that with only four names and six words absolute certainty cannot be arrived at. But it is also extremely improbable that the similarities in both cases could be mere distant parallelisms. A commonsense view would assume a close connection. In fact, Dumézil was the first to point out the analogy between enumeration of the gods in the tablet and in *Rig-Veda* 10:125–1b.c.

I feel that it is not unreasonable to assume that a people very much like the Aryans of India formed the ruling aristocracy among the Mitannians of upper Mesopotamia, and also that the history of the Hindu gods should begin with the list of the gods of the Mitannians in the Hittite treaty. But no other mention of these gods or any Hindu god is to be found in any inscription anywhere for about twelve hundred years after this.

The next epigraphic mention of a Hindu god occurs in India, and it is found in an inscription by a Greek, and not a Hindu. It is the Garuda pillar inscription at Besnagar, which has been assigned to the end of the second century B.C. This is about one hundred years later than the famous Asoka inscriptions, which are the earliest and largest body of inscriptions to be found in India. But those inscriptions do not mention any Hindu god, though they refer to Brahmins.

The Besnagar inscription is in Prakrit, the popular spoken language of ancient India, and it records the erection of the pillar in the following words: 'This pillar with a Garuda capital *(Garuda-dhvaja)* of the god of gods *(deva-devasya)* Vasudeva has been erected by the devotee of the Blessed One *(Bhāgavatena)* Heliodorous, son of Dions.' This Heliodorous was the envoy of the Greek king Antialcidas at the court of an unknow Hindu king. The inscription is decisive proof of the existence of the cult of Vishnu as identified with Krishna, as early as the second century B.C.

From this time down to the fourth century after Christ, references to Hindu gods, cults, and rituals are to be found in inscriptions over the whole of India. They are not indeed numerous, but they furnish fixed points for working out the chronology of the cults and practices. These early inscriptions are also almost all in Prakrit or the popular language, and very rarely in Sanskrit.

The earliest and most important of them is the Nanaghat cave

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inscription which has been assigned to the first century B.C. on palaeographic grounds. It proclaims a queen's obeisance to Dharma, Indra, Baladeva, Vasudeva, Surya, Chandra, and the four guardians of the world, viz., Yama, Varuna, Kuvera, and Vasabha, and records gifts as well as performances of Vedic sacrifices. The gifts are to Brahmins, and one gift consisted of 11,000 cows and one elephant. The sacrifices referred to are the *Rk*, *Agnyadheya*, and *Analambhaniya*.

The other inscriptions of this epoch provide evidence for various cults and practices. The name Sivarakshita (protected by Siva) is found in an inscription from the time of the Parthian king Azes (*c.* first century A.D.). The name Sivasena is also found. Both indicate the existence of the cult of Siva. The existence of the Vishnu-Krishna cult is more directly testified. An inscription of the first century A.D. records the building of a gate *(toraṇa)* to Vasudeva. A later inscription (A.D. 278–9) contains an explicit homage to Vishnu in the words: 'Obeisance to the Blessed *(Bhagavat)*, Supreme God of Gods *(Deva-parama-Deva)*, Ancient Spirit *(Purāna-Purusha)* Narayana.' This is from Nagarjunakonda.

As to religious practices, one inscription of the first century A.D. refers to Benares as a holy place. Inscriptions from Nasik from the time of Nahapana, the Saka Satrap (beginning of the second century A.D.) records gifts to Brahmins and also refers to feeding them ceremonially. Lastly, another inscription from Nagarjunakonda (A.D. 273–4) mentions the following Vedic sacrifices: *Asvamedha, Agnishtoma, Agnihotra, Vajapeya.*

Reference to the deities and rituals become more numerous with the advent of the Gupta dynasty (*c.* A.D. 320). However, these become adequate only after the accession of the third king of the dynasty, Chandra Gupta II (376–415), while by the seventh century—the latest limit for this summary—the information derived from the inscriptions shows that the cults and practices of Hinduism as known in recent times are fully established. I give below a summary of the data from the inscriptions of this period instead of setting them forth inscription by inscription.[1]

Among the deities Vishnu comes first. The other names under which he is mentioned are those traditionally given to him, and

[1] The main, though not the sole, collection from which the information is drawn is Fleet's *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3, 'Inscriptions of the early Gupta Kings and their Successors' (1888).

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some of them are specifically the names of Krishna. All his mythological relationships and attributes are given in their traditional forms. He is the husband of Lakshmi (Sri), younger brother of Indra, lord of the serpent Ananta or Sesha; he has four arms, and bears the wheel or discus, the club, the bow Sarnga, and wears the jewel Kaustubha and a garland; his mount is the bird-man Garuda; he lies in the ocean and sleeps for four months; he became incarnate as Varaha (boar), as Nrisimha (man-lion), as Vamana (dwarf), and he destroyed many demons; he is the supporting pillar of the three worlds. Some special and significant attributes of Vishnu are also mentioned. In one inscription he is hailed as creator, preserver, and destroyer and so on, not simply as preserver. In three inscriptions the earth is described as belonging to Vishnu or as being the female principle in Vishnu in an embodied form—*Bhur-vaishnavi.*

In many inscriptions Vishnu is God *par excellence*, and is mentioned simply under the name of Bhagavat (the Divine or Blessed One) without any specific name. It should be noted that the term *Bhagavata* always denotes a worshipper of Vishnu, and that the two most authoritative texts of Vaishnavism are entitled *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana.*

Krishna is referred to under this name and also as Vāsudeva (son of Vasudeva). He is shown in his epic, mythological, and divine characters. Of the identification of Vishnu and Krishna more will be said later.

Lakshmi under the alternative name of Sri (grace) is referred to as the wife of Vishnu.

The inscriptions of this age show that a fully developed cult of Vishnu was in existence, for many kings and chiefs proclaim themselves as worshippers of Vishnu under his various names, among which are also the names of Krishna.

In addition, the building of temples and other monuments to Vishnu is recorded. There is an inscription of A.D. 423–4 which says that a minister named Mayuraksha built a place for Vishnu which was as high as the mount Kailasa in order to proclaim his great devotion *(bhakti)* to the god. Another inscription records that a chief named Chakrapalita who had offered his life at the feet of Govinda *(Govinda-padārpita-jīvana)* has also built a house for Vishnu under the name *Chakrabhṛt* (bearer of the discus) in A.D. 437–8. To give some more examples, on the Iron Pillar of Meh-

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rauli near Delhi whose date and attribution are uncertain, but which has been assumed to have been erected by one of the early Guptas, is inscribed that the column was erected as the standard of Bhagavan Vishnu, and the place is called Vishnupada or feet of Vishnu. The other temple of Vishnu, described as *bhavanottama*, 'the excellent house', was built by Adityasena of the family of the Guptas of Magadha at a place near modern Gaya, probably in the seventh century.

The cult of Siva is also seen as fully developed, and as an alternative to that of Vishnu. It presents exact parallelisms. Just as the devotee of Vishnu described themselves as *Parama* or *Atyanta-Bhagavata*, those of Siva called themselves *Parama-Mahesvara*. It has to be explained that Siva as the supreme God is always referred to as Isa, Isvara, or Mahesvara, that is, Lord or Great Lord, whereas Vishnu is referred to as Bhagavat (the Blessed or Divine One). The appellation of Siva as the Lord *par excellence* has persisted down to this day.

He is referred to under all his familiar mythological names: Bhutapati, Hara, Isa, Isvara, Mahadeva, Mahesvara, Paramesvara, Pasupati, Pinakin, Sambhu, Sarva, Sthanu, Sulapani, Tripurantaka, Visvanatha, etc. All his physical attributes are seen to be as they are in mythological books. He has tawny and matted hair, and the moon on his forehead. All his mythological associations are also mentioned in the inscriptions: he is the husband of Devi or Parvati and father of Kartikeya; he rides the bull Nandin; he reduced the god of love to ashes.

It would seem that Siva also had shrines in this period. The king Anantavarman records that he had a marvellous image of Bhutapati (Siva) installed in a cave. There is also reference to the *linga* as his symbol. The Vakataka king Pravarasena II (*c.* end of the fifth century A.D.) says in one of his inscriptions that he gave great satisfaction to Siva by carrying his *linga* on his shoulder. Finally, as with Vishnu so with Siva, the character of the deity is that he is a complete God, and not as in Hindu theory only a god of destruction. In the Mandasore inscription of Yasodharman (*c.* middle of the sixth century) Siva is described as the creator of the world *(Bhava-srj)* and its continuator as well.

The cult of his wife Parvati is also seen side by side. In the inscriptions she is referred to as Devi (the goddess or lady), Bhavani, or Katyayani. The name Durga, under which she is

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worshipped as the mother goddess *par excellence*, is not found, but the character of the goddess is seen to be identical, for as Bhavani and Katyayani she is described as the killer of the demon Mahishasura. The Maukhari king Anantavarman says in his Nagarjunakonda inscription that he has set up an image of Katyayani in a cave in the Vindhya hills, and that she is seen with her foot (jingling with an anklet) on the head of Mahishasura. He also records that he has made the gift of a village for her service.

One inscription dating from A.D. 423–4, the same in which the minister Mayuraksha says that he erected an image of Vishnu, also shows that a form of Sakta worship, i.e. worship of the mother goddess as the embodiment of power, existed, and that it was some sort of prototype of the later Tantric cult. The word *Tāntra* (adjectival form of *Tantra*) is found, and the inscription says that the minister has built a terrible abode of the Mothers *(Mātṛam)*, who shout with joy and stir up the oceans with winds raised by magical ceremonies *(tantrodbhuta-prabala-pavanodvārtita' ambhonidhinām)*. It adds that this abode is full of the female evil spirits called Dakinis. I have not found the name Kali in any inscription of the period.

Besides these major cults there was also a cult of the sun as a god. There is an inscription which gives a very interesting and elaborate description of the building of a temple to the sun in A.D. 437–8 by a guild of silk-weavers at Dasapura. The building *(bhavana)* is said to be noble, spacious, and incomparable, and with a high steeple *(sikhara)*.

Gods and goddesses for whom there were no major cults, but whose names are familiar from mythology, are also mentioned in the inscriptions. Among them are Varuna, Indra, Sachi, Yama, Kuvera, Kartikeya, Kama, Rati, Chandra, and others. Even the monkey god Hanuman is mentioned. The attributes and associations given to them in the inscriptions are identical with those given in the Puranas.

The origin of the Vedas has already become legendary in this age, and the sage Vyasa is referred to as the arranger of the Vedas. However, Vedic studies are referred to as an active sacerdotal occupation, and what is more important Vedic public sacrifices are shown by the epigraphic references to be common in all these historic centuries, among them even the *Asvamedha*, the supreme sacrifice of the conqueror, is referred to again and again

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from the first century B.C. to much later centuries. But this only testifies to the continuation of the Vedic *Karmakanda* (ritualistic injunctions) in an age in which the Vedic religious beliefs had become wholly obsolete. Actually, one inscription of Chandra Gupta II states that Samudra Gupta restored the Asvamedha or horse sacrifice which had been in abeyance for centuries. The mythological information as a whole found in the inscriptions is also identical with what is found in the texts. There is no difference whatever.

Representation in Art and Sacred Buildings

Representation of the deities in art supplements the data from the inscriptions bearing on the development of all Hindu cults. However, the expression of Hinduism in art is very much later than that of Buddhism. The legends of Buddha began to be illustrated in sculpture at least from the second century B.C. In contrast, the Hindu gods and goddesses do not appear in art on any noticeable scale before the fifth century A.D. and even then the examples are not numerous. But as soon as the Hindu gods and goddesses appear in sculpture, they are seen to be very much like what they have been in recent centuries. They also conform to the Puranic forms which have been supposed to be later developments from a hypothetical earlier form of Hinduism. There is, however, no archaeological evidence to prove the historical existence of any other form of Hinduism. For instance, even the small number of representations which have come down from the period before the fifth century show that the cult of Siva, Vishnu, and Sakti (or Durga) are fully developed in the forms in which they have been seen in recent times. As it is not possible to mention all the representations of the Hindu deities found in sculpture, only those which are important for the establishment of the chronology of the cults are included in the following summary.

The earliest representations are not in sculpture, but on small objects like seals and coins. The iconographical interpretation of the signs or figures in the very early objects of this class is very doubtful. I shall therefore only mention those in which the identification is certain.

Two very early examples of representation are on coins. One of them, assumed to date from the third century before Christ,

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shows the well-known motif known as Gaja-Lakshmi, i.e. the goddess of wealth and prosperity flanked on either side by an elephant with the trunk raised as if in salute. This design is found on other coins dating from the second century B.C. down to the first century A.D. and it was also repeated on other kinds of objects, e.g. lamps.

In a coin from the environs of Ujjayini, assigned to the first or second century, Siva appears for the first time, but the clearest representation of the god is on a copper seal found at Sirkap in north-western India, dating from the first century A.D. Most of the early representations of Siva come from the extreme north-west of India, and are assigned to the epoch of the Scythians, Kushanas, and other foreign rulers. The outstanding school of Indian sculpture of this period, generally known as the Mathura school, provides very few examples of Hindu iconography, though the representation of Buddhist legends in it is very impressive.

Representation of Hindu deities in Indian sculpture becomes noticeable only from the so-called Gupta period, whose commencement is placed early in the fourth century A.D. But the extant examples of major sculpture are all later than A.D. 400, and even these are not very numerous. Appearance of Hindu gods in sculpture becomes really impressive only after the middle of the seventh century. None the less, the examples from the Gupta age establish that the three Hindu cults of Siva, Vishnu, and Durga were already developed to a point at which they became standardized.

An early coin of this period, with the figure of the first Gupta monarch Chandra Gupta I (A.D. 320–45), shows on the reverse the figure of a goddess seated on a lion. This does not depict Durga as she is in the later standardized iconography, but the deity may be assumed to be the goddess. A later coin of the reign of Kumara Gupta (A.D. 414–55) shows another seated goddess, who cannot be identified. But the representation of the Hindu war-god Kartikeya and of Ganga (the river Ganges deified), as found on the coins of this period, are of the standard type. Clearly, by the end of the fifth century the gods of Hindu mythology and cults had received their well-known iconographical forms.

This is also the conclusion which can be drawn from sculpture in the round and in relief. A very important group, dating from the early part of the fifth century, is to be seen outside the caves

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of Udayagiri, near Bhopal. Architecturally, the caves are not notable. But the representation of the major gods and of mythological themes at this place are of great historical importance, for the figures are the earliest examples of standard Hindu iconography. There is a remarkable high relief showing Vishnu with his four arms and the familiar adjuncts. There is also a great relief—one of the largest in India—depicting the boar incarnations of Vishnu. The existence of the cult of Siva in the familiar form is proved by a remarkable *linga*. It has the face of the god with his three eyes carved on it. The cult of Durga is seen in its full development in two representations of her as Mahishamardini or slayer of the demon Mahisha. The postures are different in the two figures, and this fact indicates that the iconography of this episode in the mythology of Durga had not become standardized. But the theme was.

Another important group of sculptures, from a slightly later date is at Eran, not very far from Udayagiri. The most notable figures from this site are those of two incarnations of Vishnu, namely, the Varaha or boar, and Nrisimha or man-lion.

Figures connected with the cults of Siva and Durga are to be seen at a third site in the same area, namely, Badoh Pathari. One set of figures in relief show the Sapta Matrikas or Seven Mothers connected with the cult of Durga, and there is another figure showing Siva in his special form of Virabhadra. Besides these there are at other places detached figures of Vishnu, Siva, and other gods. As the dates are not certain it is not necessary to mention individual examples. However, those whose dates are reasonably certain establish the existence in the fifth century of the major Hindu cults in the form in which they are known even today.

One point should, however, be made clear in connection with these representations. The pieces belonging to this epoch appear to be illustrations of mythology, and not images of gods meant for worship in temples. In fact, it is very difficult to say which images were placed in the sanctums for actual worship.

The sacred buildings which have survived intact or in ruins have to be considered next. These duplicate the evidence supplied by the inscriptions and works of art, and reveal the same historical development or state of the religion. However, the buildings consecrated to Hinduism are not only much later than the earliest

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Buddhist monuments, they are later even than the reliefs or statues in the round of Hindu divinities.

The remains of the earliest structure which can be regarded as a temple has been found not in India but in Afghanistan. They were discovered at a place called Surkh Kotal in 1951 by Schlumberger, who was then the head of the French archaeological mission at Kabul. The ruins do not show the structure to be wholly like a Greek temple, but it had hypostylar features. In it was also found a long inscription of Kanishka in Greek letters, but not in the Greek language. The language is Etio-Tokharian, the ancient Indo-European dialect of Bactria.

There is no agreement as yet about the character of this temple. Schlumberger regarded it as a fire temple of the Persian type. But André Maricq thinks that it is a temple to King Kanishka as god, that is, a temple for some kind of imperial cult, like that of the Roman emperors.

The date of the temple also cannot be determined because the date of Kanishka is itself uncertain. But there can be no doubt that it is the earliest structure in India or in any adjacent country which can be regarded as a temple.

If one could be more certain about the cult for which this temple was built, it would have been possible to fix the date of image worship in temples in India and adjacent regions as early as the second century A.D. But the certainty is absent, and therefore the remains at Surkh Kotal can be regarded only as evidence for the erection of a structure which is undoubtedly a temple and the earliest one found so far in the Indian region.[1]

Nor are the remains found in India proper of greater help in dating the beginnings of image worship in temples, because they are all later than the inscriptions and the sculptures which mention or indicate that kind of worship. The earliest of these remains have not been regarded as earlier than the late fourth or early fifth century A.D. The two temples which have survived more or less intact in their structure, though damaged, can at the earliest be assigned to the latter half of the fifth century. But some scholars have placed them in the seventh century.

Both these temples are dedicated to Vishnu. One of them is at

[1] *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1961), Albert Reckitt archaeological lecture by D. Schlumberger, 31 May 1961, pp. 77–95. *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 246, pp. 345–440: 'Inscription de Surkh-Kotal', André Maricq.

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Deogarh in the area of the Udayagiri monuments. It is built of stone, and has some fine sculptures on it. The second temple is in the Gangetic plain at Bhitargaon and is built of brick. In fact, it is the earliest brick temple found in India. Owing to its location it has an added importance, for it is the only early temple surviving in the central region of Hindu culture, all the other early remains are in the outlying regions. The absence of temples in this region is due to the fact that over the whole of the Gangetic plain the temples were systematically destroyed by the Muslim conquerors. The result of this destruction will be considered later.

The reason for the survival in these cases seems to be that all these temples were small structures. The sanctum of the temple at Deogarh is only nine feet nine inches square, while that of Bhitargaon is fifteen feet square. All that is established by these remains is that by the end of the sixth century worship in temples had become well established. However, it cannot be said that even then the temples were very impressive in size or style.

Information from Foreign Accounts

Of the foreigners who have left accounts of India the Greeks were the earliest, and the Chinese, who naturally felt an interest in the land of Buddha and wished to learn about his doctrines at first hand, came many centuries later. However, the most detailed description of the religious beliefs and sciences of the Hindus is to be found in the work on India of the great Muslim scholar Alberuni, who compiled it at the beginning of the eleventh century. Though it is a very important source for the state of Hinduism in that age, it has not been drawn upon for this chapter as it is much later than the chronological limits set for it.

Information which the Graeco-Roman world had about India was derived, as has been said already, from the Greeks who accompanied Alexander the Great (327–325 B.C.) in his expedition to India, and also from Megasthenes who represented Seleucus at the court of Chandragupta Maurya (*c.* 300 B.C.). But none of the original accounts, including that of Megasthenes, have survived. They are all found in extracts incorporated in the writings of later Greek and Roman authors, the most important of whom are Strabo (*c.* 63 B.C.–*c.* A.D. 23), Arrian (*c.* A.D. 96–180), and Plutarch (*c.* A.D. 46–120).

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The information on religion in these accounts does not amount to much, and what is given comes mainly from Strabo and Arrian who wrote on the authority of Megasthenes. The Greek legend was that Dionysos had conquered India and also that Herakles had gone towards that country. So, what the Greeks saw of religion in India was connected by them with both. Strabo (*Geography* Bk 15.1.58) cites Megasthenes as saying that in the mountainous regions the people were votaries of Dionysos, whereas on the plains they honoured Herakles. Arrian (*Indica* 8.4, 11.12) on the same authority mentions Mathura as the place where Herakles was held in special honour. No Hindu gods are mentioned by these or any other classical authors, but the Greek names obviously suggest Siva and Krishna as the Hindu deities. However, it is not possible to infer from these references whether the cults of Siva and Krishna were already in existence in the age with which Strabo deals. The Greek verb is *tim-ao*, which means to honour, esteem, or worship. In any case, the existence of the mythology of Siva and Krishna seemed to be suggested, and also the later connection of Siva with the Himalayas and of Krishna with Mathura.

These two classical authors as well as others give information about the social aspects of the Hindu religion. Their accounts of the various groups of religious men are often confused, but broadly speaking their descriptions agree with what is known from Indian sources as well as observation. In the first place, the Hindus are distinguished from the Buddhists. The Hindu priestly order is called the *Brachmanes* and the Buddhist the *Garmanes* by Arrian, i.e. the *Brahmanas* and the *Sramanas* in Sanskrit. After that an account is given of the system of education of the Brahmins, which conforms to the first or Brahmacharya stage of Hindu life of their sacred law. But the Greeks were most struck by the Hindu philosophers, especially by those whom they called Gymnosophists or naked philosophers. Alexander, according to these writers, had both friendly and unfriendly dealings with them.

In dealing with the Hindus who specially devoted themselves to religious life, the classical authors made a distinction between those who lived as recluses in their hermitages in the woods, and those who wandered from place to place and practised extreme asceticism. The former were obviously the sages *(Rishis)* of the epics and classical Sanskrit literature, and the latter the sadhus

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who are so conspicuous a feature of Hindu religious life even today. With their matted hair, uncouth appearance, and nudity they were equally conspicuous to the Greeks. The classical writers also noted the prevalence of religious and philosophical discussion among religious men, and gave examples of some of the opinions expressed. One author, Quintus Curtius Rufus even said that the Hindu philosophers were fond of wrangling, quarrelsome, foolish, and boastful. But generally the Graeco-Roman world looked upon them as the repositories of esoteric knowledge and wisdom.

The Chinese travellers take up the story much later. All of them wrote from their own observation of religious life as it was when they came to India. There were three famous pilgrims who came to learn at first hand about Buddhism. The first was Fa-Hien, who travelled throughout India from A.D. 399 to A.D. 414. The second, Hiuan-tsang, or Yuan-Chwang, was in India between A.D. 629 and A.D. 645, i.e. during the reign of Harsha. The third Chinese, I-Tsing, came a little later, arriving in India in A.D. 671 and returning in A.D. 695.

The account given by Fa-Hien is very curious. Although he visited India when the Gupta dynasty was at the height of its power with Chandra Gupta II on the throne, and went not only to the places sacred to Buddhism, but also to the centres of Hindu culture like Mathura, Kanyakubja, and Pataliputra (assumed to be the capital of the Gupta Empire), he does not mention any great king by name, nor does he refer to anything like an imperial system in which one king exercised suzerainty over others. He presents the picture of a large country divided into small kingdoms. He does not describe Hindu cults, and in his account there are very few references to temples. He speaks more than once of the rivalry between the worshippers of the Devas (i.e. the Hindu gods) and the Buddhists, but does not give details of Hindu beliefs and practices. As to temples, one notable reference is to a Deva temple in Jetavana at Sravasti which was erected opposite a Vihara (Buddhist monastery) and was more than sixty cubits, or ninety feet, high.

This neglect of things Hindu may be explained by the fact that, being a pious Buddhist, Fa-Hien was interested only in his own religion and did not record anything about Hinduism or Hindu kings. But the book is also a traveller's account, and in respect of one region at least, the Madhya Desa (Middle Country) around

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Mathura, he gives a short description of the system of government. The absence of all allusions to the imperial Guptas is thus surprising.

The paucity of Fa-Hien's references to temples also requires explanation for he must have seen them wherever they existed. Whether this could mean that at the beginning of the fifth century temples were neither numerous nor very impressive cannot be stated with certainty. But such a supposition would be justified by the fact that very few remains of Hindu temples have come down from the fifth century. As has been mentioned above, the surviving buildings are overwhelmingly in outlying areas and not on the Gangetic plain. It is quite possible that whatever sacred structures from early times existed in that region have disappeared along with the monuments of later periods. In any case, if the temple cult existed in the fifth century, Fa-Hien does not show that it had a very impressive expression.

In contrast, Yuan-Chwang, who visited India about two hundred and twenty-five years later, presents a wholly different picture. He not only speaks about Harsha and his political power and refers to other things, agreeing broadly in his account with the version of Harsha's life given in *Harsha-Charita*; he also records the existence of Hindu temples and gives their number wherever he saw them from the Punjab to Assam, together with the number of Buddhist *viharas*. For instance, he says that at Kanyakubja on the Ganges (which Fa-Hien also visited), there were splendid temples of Surya (the Sun god) and of Mahesvara (Siva). At Prayag (modern Allahabad), according to him, there was a celebrated temple and near it a spreading tree—clearly the Akshaya Vata or the indestructible banyan tree of our times. In his description of Varanasi (modern Benares) Yuan-Chwang mentions there were 100 temples in the whole district and 20 in the city itself. He also specifically mentions that the chief deity of Benares was Siva (which he also is today), and that there was a life-like image of him, awe-inspiring in its majesty. Of course, he also describes the Buddhist holy place of Sarnath (about eight miles from Benares) and also records the existence of a *stupa* (tumulus) built by Asoka (the Dhameka Stupa, which still stands there).

Yuan-Chwang's description of the kingdom of Kamarupa is very interesting. He says that under its Hindu king, Vaskaravarman, an ally of Harsha, the religion of the kingdom was Hin-

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duism, and that such Buddhists as lived in it practised their religion secretly. From all that Yuan-Chwang says it would appear that a great development of the material expression of Hinduism had taken place between the time of Fa-Hien and Yuan-Chwang unless we assume that Fa-Hien deliberately kept silent about Hinduism and Hindu monuments.

Not less interesting is Yuan-Chwang's description of the holy character of the Ganges, which he emphasizes. He writes of a place which he calls the Ganges Gate (clearly modern Hardwar) —the Gate of Siva—where the river debouches into the plain), and says that it is a place of great religious merit where sin and guilt are extinguished. He also emphasizes the sacredness of the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna at Prayag (modern Allahabad), and it is still sacred. He writes that every day numbers of people arrive at the confluence to drown themselves in its sacred waters in the hope that they might be reborn in heaven. He adds that even monkeys and other wild creatures do this. He also noticed the presence of hermits practising their austerities on the bank of the rivers near the confluence. They are still to be seen at this spot.

I-Tsing, the third pilgrim from China, records nothing about Hinduism. That may be due to the fact that his book, apart from a short summary of his journey, is an account of Buddhist doctrines and practices as he found them in India. He was not concerned with Hinduism or other aspects of Hindu life.

Information from Secular Literature

The value of the data about Hinduism which can be found in secular literature in Sanskrit and Prakrit is lessened by the uncertainty about the dates of the books. As has been seen, neither the two epics nor the works of the greatest Sanskrit poets can be assigned to particular dates. The stories of the epics must have been current from fairly early times, but they could not have received their present form before the third century A.D. Secular poetry is later.

Apart from the two epics, which form a special category, I have examined the works of Kalidasa, who is certainly the earliest of the ancient Indian poets whose writings have survived and whose date I have assumed to be either the late fifth or sixth century A.D. After him I have consulted the works of Bharavi,

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Bana, Dandin, Subandhu, and Magha, i.e. all the poets who may be presumed to have lived before the eighth century. Besides them, I have gone to Bhavabhuti, generally assigned to the eighth century, and to Sri Harsha, author of *Naishadha Charita*, who comes later. In addition, I have consulted the important poetical anthology in Prakrit, the *Gatha Saptasati*.

The two epics, whenever they were put into their present form, embody the legends of the early existence of the Aryans in India. Of these two, the *Ramayana* certainly describes a stage of that existence which is earlier than that described in the *Mahabharata*. But compared with the *Ramayana* in its extant form the *Mahabharata* is more archaic in the treatment of the stories and in the atmosphere it creates. However, this difference does not affect their value as sources for a history of Hinduism, because both give religious and mythological information of the same type.

To consider the mythology first. The *Ramayana* is itself partly a mythological story, and the *Mahabharata* can be regarded as an almost complete corpus of Hindu mythology. The first point to note is that the mythology of the epics is, in spite of differences in detail, identical with what is found in the specifically mythological books, the Puranas. Again, the mythological stories and legends which furnish the staple of the themes in secular literature in Sanskrit properly so called, are also identical in their substance with those of the epics and Puranas. Thus the Puranas, the epics, and the later plays and poems present one coherent body of mythology as against Vedic mythology. This mythology is the Hindu mythology proper, and it has remained unchanged to this day. This is also the mythology referred to in the inscriptions and depicted in art.

But though the themes are identical, the spirit in which they are treated in late Sanskrit secular literature, is wholly different from that of the epics. The distinction has to be pointed out because an overwhelming number of subjects in the later plays and poems are taken from the epics. The themes are, so to speak, humanized and even sentimentalized. This is all the more significant because the epics and the later works of literature are written in the same classical Sanskrit, although the diction and metres in the epics are much simpler. The later poets treated the themes which they took over with a more complex artistry.

More important is the difference in the emotional quality. The

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mind of the heroes and heroines is more primitive in the epics and their behaviour is not only more frank and assertive but also flamboyant. In classical Sanskrit literature the same characters and incidents become more subdued, complex, and sophisticated. The difference is greater than that which exists between a Greek mythological story as found in Homer or Hesiod and in Sophocles or Euripides. Indeed, Kalidasa's Sakuntala is as different from the Sakuntala of the Mahabharata as is Tennyson's Oenone from the original Achaean maiden. A very striking example of the contrast is furnished by Bhavabhuti's treatment of the later life of Rama and Sita in his *Uttara-Rama-Charita* when set against his source in the seventh canto of the *Ramayana*. The same contrast can be seen in every play or poem in classical Sanskrit literature. Despite the difference of treatment the secular literature, together with the epics and the Puranas, has presented one solid block of Hindu mythology, which the Hindu has always regarded as the only historical background of their life and religion.

In regard to religion as distinct from mythology, secular Sanskrit literature exhibits conformity with as well as departure from the epics, and this dichotomy is extremely important for the history of Hinduism. Naturally, information about religion in literature is only incidental. It is also so in one of the epics, the *Ramayana*. The *Mahabharata*, however, contains more information and presents a very full picture of the life of the sages in the hermitages. In both, the religious rites are of the Vedic type, but none of them refer to temples or image worship. The secular books, when they present religion, describe Vedic rituals as well as image worship in temples.

To be more specific, when the subjects of the poems and plays of classical Sanskrit literature are the stories from mythology and legend, the religious doctrines and practices described conform to the older ritualistic system of Hinduism, and neither temples nor image worship is introduced, although when these books were written these certainly existed. The only description I have read in classical Sanskrit literature of a king of the epic cycle being represented as worshipping before an image in a shrine is of Nala in *Naishadha Charita*. But this work is very late, and the exception found in it is not significant. The earlier poets seem to have been aware that to introduce temples and image worship in the stories taken from the epics would be an anachronism.

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On the other hand, when the story belongs to the age of the poet, the cults and rituals of his own times are not excluded. This difference of treatment is exhibited by the same writer. For instance, in Bhavabhuti's *Uttara-Rama-Charita*, which adapts a story from the *Ramayana*, there is no reference whatever to temples or images. But in the same poet's *Malati-Madhava*, whose plot is contemporaneous with the writer, temples of Siva and Kali as well as their cults are found. Besides, in the prologues and introductions of plays and poems, in which the poets speak for themselves and for their age, they give expression to current doctrines. For example both in his *Sakuntala* and *Raghuvamsa* Kalidasa invokes Siva as the monotheistic deity of the Saiva cult, and not as the Siva of mythology.

To sum up, in dealing with religion, classical Sanskrit literature conforms to the inscriptions which are concerned with actual historical events. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the more elaborate Hindu inscriptions are also literature in their way, and not simply official records of historical deeds, achievements, conquests, or gifts of the monarchs. In fact, in form they are the epigraphic counterparts of poetry in the books. All the major inscriptions are in verse, and they employ the same diction and figures of speech as are found in classical Sanskrit literature.

Conclusions from the Historical Evidence

The information provided by any one of the five classes of historical evidence on Hinduism considered in this chapter, is not sufficient on its own, or for that matter in combination with others, to permit the construction of a full picture of the religion, although these are the only data which prove what was actually practised. But in spite of their small volume they are valuable in two ways: first, they furnish a dependable chronological framework into which the elaborate but undatable description in the religious texts can be fitted. Next, they clearly indicate what Hinduism was like in the sixth, the seventh, or the eighth century A.D. The facts from all these classes of evidence are consistent with one another, and they also create an impression of homogeneity.

But the data on the religion as it was before the fifth century A.D. are very scanty. Though this may not justify a definite view, it may be assumed that the paucity of evidence probably reflects an

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incubating period for Hinduism. To be more explicit, it suggests that from the third or second century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. Hinduism was evolving towards the historic form which it took at the end of the period. But the information, despite the scantiness, shows quite clearly that the Hinduism revealed by it is the same religion which is seen in its more fully developed form after the fifth century.

Now, what is even more significant for the history of Hinduism is the fact that the Hinduism which is attested by admissible historical evidence to have existed in and after the fifth century is also the Hinduism as it was in the nineteenth century, or even in my young days. In other words, the beliefs and practices of the religion have remained substantially unchanged from the fifth century to the present day. Certainly, new features have been added and some old ones modified, but nothing that existed at the beginning of the eighth century has become obsolete.

The mythology has remained virtually unchanged, for it is the same in classical Sanskrit literature and in the literature in the modern Indian languages. Only, having been brought down to a popular level in the latter, it has become more or less crude. As to beliefs and practices, Hinduism from that age down to the present shows the continuation of rituals derived from the Vedic traditions with worship according to the later cults, which have always been its basic feature. The infrastructure of the religion, if the word can be employed in this connection, has not been affected by any subsequent change. The cult of the three supreme deities, Siva, Vishnu-Krishna, and Sakti (the Mother Goddess) have flourished side by side as they are still doing. The only new development is the transformation of the cult of Vishnu-Krishna into the cult of Radha and Krishna, which is as puzzling doctrinally as it is historically. Otherwise, Hinduism has remained the same despite an immense proliferation of variations and offshoots. What can be said of trees is also true of the religion; new branches or twigs and the falling and coming of leaves do not make a new tree.

The Hinduism whose existence is established as a reality by historical evidence, is also defined as to its character by the same evidence. That is, what is known as Hinduism today is not an ancient religion. Not to speak of the Egyptian, Babylonian, or Assyrian religions, it is not even as old as the Greek religion known

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to Plato. As a fully developed religion, Hinduism does not belong to any time before the fifth century A.D. This is in line, however, with what is fully established in respect of the historic existence of Hindu civilization. It is not an old civilization, but contemporaneous with the late Roman and Byzantine, and thus Hindu civilization and historic Hinduism are coeval.

But it is equally certain that this historic Hinduism is not the only Hinduism which has existed in time. If nothing else proved that, the Boghazköy inscription does. Unfortunately, nothing definite is known about the Hindu gods for more than a thousand years after that, though the presumption that they continued to be worshipped is justified by the existence of the Vedic literature. Usually, some form of Vedic religion is assumed to be the most primitive form of Hinduism practised in India. But this religion as described by the specialists in this field is a reconstruction mainly from the *Rig-Veda*. The whole hangs, so to speak, in the air of very rarefied scholarship. The reconstruction itself may not be correct, and if it were, it might not be the whole of the archaic Hinduism from which the historic Hinduism was descended. Moreover, a part of the Vedic religion might have been already developed before the Aryans came to India, and, last of all, we do not know when they came and brought the religion with them. Altogether, whatever preceded the appearance of historic Hinduism must be regarded as the prehistory of the religion.

None the less, there is no doubt that this prehistory bequeathed a solid legacy which became the foundation of the historic Hinduism. It was embodied in a voluminous literature in archaic Sanskrit, and the link between the archaic and the historic remains unbroken. First, the later Hindu pantheon is a development of the Vedic, and all the gods of the older religion have remained gods in the new, and if in every case not in cults, at least in mythology. Secondly, the whole of the Vedic system of rituals has continued both in the public and the private practice of the religion. For example, the three most important events in a Hindu's life, initiation, marriage, and funeral—which naturally have a religious character—are conducted according to Vedic rituals even today.

In addition, there are two extraordinary facts which illustrate the dominance of the prehistoric or archaic Hinduism over the historic Hinduism. In the first place, it is the texts of archaic Hin-

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duism, including even the most formal and arid treatises on ritual, which are accepted as the only revealed scriptures of Hinduism, and not even the most authoritative and venerated texts of the later cults have this status, even though they enunciate the doctrines and practices of the living cults.

Next, even more surprisingly, the only obligatory religious duties of a Hindu are those which are laid down in the old ritualistic literature. In contrast, all the doctrines and rites of the later cults are left to option. No injunction compels a Hindu to believe in any of the gods of the later cults or to go to a temple to worship them. The universal and impressive observances of the later Hinduism are dependent on a free, personal choice by all Hindus. In a word, the Hindus practise their historic religion only *ad libitum*.

It is as if the historic and living Hinduism was an elaborate cadenza to an unplayed composition, on which the Hindus have been improvising variations in near and distant keys without feeling that they are being unorthodox. This behaviour springs from their unwavering loyalty to the archaic religion embodied in the Vedas as the *fons et origo* of all their life in India.

The submission to a lost past can only be regarded as the compulsion of a fossilized historic memory, which makes them cherish the religion which they brought with them when they migrated to India. It continued to influence their life and religion unconsciously all through, and became the foundation of the superstructure which they raised in India. The nature of this heritage and foundation has to be considered next.

Note

In addition to the facts given on p. 43, names of the Mitannian kings should be taken into account. Their meaning can be determined with the help of Vedic Sanskrit, for instance: Artatama = Ṛta-dhāma (abode of Ṛta); Parsa-shatar = Para-sastar (chastiser of enemies); Tushratta = Tvish-ratha (he who has a splendid chariot); Aitagama = Eta-gama (he who has the gait of an antelope; Biryawaza = Vīrya-vāja (he who has valour).

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Chapter Three

INDO-EUROPEAN CORE OF HINDUISM

THE earliest form of Hinduism, which I have described as prehistoric by applying the criterion of true historicity, is really the Indo-European core of the religion, and its Indo-European character is only one aspect of the general Indo-European complexion of the life and culture, as well as the institutions, of the ancient Hindus.

The most important proof of the affiliation is, of course, linguistic—the well-established fact that all the languages of northern India, both ancient and modern, belong to the Indo-European family. Since language is the vehicle of all mental activity, it may be assumed, *a priori,* that when a people speak a language closely related to others, there will be some affinity between them and the speakers of the other languages in mental cast and basic features of cultural life.

In writing about Hindu culture some writers have under–rated the importance of the Indo-European character of the north Indian languages on the ground that the languages of south India are not Indo-European, but Dravidian. This has been a red herring across the true historical trail of Hindu civilization since the middle of the nineteenth century. Before that no Hindu of the south thought that he was in any way different from a Hindu of the north in culture and religion. In actual fact, the linguistic difference between the south and the north in India has no significance whatever for cultural history, although the geographical situations have had some.

Even the linguistic distinction has been grossly exaggerated. The south Indian languages are Dravidian only in syntax and the workaday part of the vocabulary. All the words which embody cultural notions in them are Sanskritic or translations of Sanskrit or Prakrit words into Dravidian forms, just as many German words which constitute the vocabulary of culture are only etymological equivalents of words in Greek or Latin. Besides, all along Sanskrit has been the basis of the highest culture of the south, and

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in recent times Sanskrit was better understood and more thoroughly studied there than in northern India. To cut the matter short, there is not a single element in the culture of any civilized human group in south India which is not Aryan-Brahmanic.

Why this pan-Indian Aryan-Brahmanic culture of peninsular India came to have a composite linguistic medium at the popular level is easily explained. The Aryan colonists from the north who took civilization to the south spoke their own language (some kind of Prakrit) originally. This is testified by the Asokan inscriptions in Mysore whose significance has already been explained. At the same time, in the south as in the north, the sacerdotal language must have been Sanskrit. But as the great mass of the aboriginal people over whom the colonists from the north dominated spoke some form of the languages which are now classified as Dravidian,[1] they too adopted these partially. There are two familiar parallels for this kind of adoption: the Normans in England took over the Anglo-Saxon grammatical forms and words, and in India the Turks, Mongols, and Persians went over to the syntax and vocabulary of Hindi. This has no relevance to the cultural situation. There are, of course, differences in the cultural expression between the north and the south. But these are due to local evolution, and are in no way more basic than the regional variations in the Hindu culture of the north. In fact, popular Hinduism in the Gangetic plain differs to a greater degree from higher Hinduism than does any form of Hinduism in the south. Linguistic differences have played no part in the cultural differentiation.

Concept of Indo-European

The really important question which arises in determining the original character of Hinduism is different, namely, whether the concept of Indo-European can be extended from language to culture, social life, and institutions. This question arises from the fact that there is no evidence for the existence of an original and undifferentiated Indo-European culture which can be regarded as the prototype of the separate cultures of the peoples speaking

[1] This supposition is justified by the fact that in central India the aboriginal Gonds speak a language which has been classified as 'Dravidian', in which case it must be close to the primitive Dravidian dialects of the south.

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the Indo-European languages, viz., the Greeks, Italians, Celts, Germans, Slavs, Iranians, and Indians. But the existence of a common and original Indo-European culture, however rudimentary, is not more problematical than the existence of a common Indo-European language. Actually, the proto-Indo-European language has been reconstructed by working backwards from the words common to the historic languages of the same family, and the existence of such a language has not been denied in theory.

A linguistic ancestor like this could have had its counterpart in a cultural ancestor, and it has already been stated that its existence can be assumed a priori. But there are facts in addition to inference to establish it as a reality. A fair number of words have been found in countries from India to Ireland which embody concepts and whose Indo-European primitive forms have been determined. These show that the proto-Indo-European language was rich in ideas. Even when the words, which express ideas and are common to a number of modern historic Indo-European languages, have not been taken back to the proto-Indo-European stage, the mere fact of some of them being common to Celtic or Latin on the one hand and Sanskrit on the other would suggest a common origin for the ideas, for later borrowing is inconceivable.

Both kinds of words have been brought together by Émile Benveniste, and after studying them he has established a vocabulary of Indo-European institutions relating to economy, family, social life, power, law, and religion.[1] It is, however, Georges Dumézil who has established the common religious heritage of the Indo-European peoples. In a long series of books he has set forth the common features in the religions of the people who spoke the Indo-European languages in ancient times. No student of Hinduism today can neglect his work.

When trying, however, to establish the basic Indo-European character of Hinduism, it is necessary to be very clear about the classes of evidence on which the demonstration is to rest. I am depending on three kinds of facts: first, words of the Hindu religious vocabulary which either go back to the proto-Indo-European language or have analogues in European languages; secondly, certain notions and concepts in Hinduism which could not have originated in the geographical environment which India provides but could only have come from some cold region; lastly,

[1] Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, 2 vols. (1969).

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certain rituals and beliefs in Hinduism which show a clear similarity with those of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans, Scandinavians, or Slavs.

Religious Vocabulary

To begin then with the linguistic facts. A number of basic words of Hinduism, like words denoting personal relationships and certain other features of human life, go back even to the oldest proto-Indo-European stage, when the separate languages of the different branches of the Indo-Europeans had not appeared. Coming to the differentiated stage, Sanskrit shows closer affinity with two Western groups than with the other Indo-European languages. It has been recognized for a long time that the Celtic and Italic groups on the one hand and the Indo-Iranian on the other have a number of common words in respect of liturgy and ritual. The connection between the Indian and the Western world is best illustrated by the words for 'king', whose office was a quasi-religious institution. It is *ri* in Hiberno-Celtic, *rix* in Gallo-Celtic (as in Vercingetorix, 'warrior king'), *rex* in Latin, and *rāj (an)* in Sanskrit.

These words have been taken back to a reconstructed Indo-European root *reg*, meaning 'to move in a straight line', with the extension 'to direct in a straight line, lead, rule', and from this a lengthened-grade form *rēg*, meaning 'tribal king' has been reconstructed in the old Indo-European. All this is inference from the usually accepted etymology of the Latin word *rex*. It is supposed to be derived from the verb *regere*, 'to direct', from which *rectus*, etc., are also derived. This would connect the idea of kingship with the notion of order in the universe, which in Sanskrit is *ṛta*. But in Sanskrit the true derivation was lost, and the word *rāj (an)*, instead of being connected with *ṛta*, was derived by Sanskrit grammarians and lexicographers from the verbal root *rāj*, which means 'to shine'. That is, the word for 'king' was assimilated in its verbal significance to the word for 'god', namely, *deva*, which is the noun form of the root *div*, 'to shine'.

But such general similarities are not all. There are more specific religious words which are homologous in Sanskrit and the old European languages. The most important of these is, of course, the primary word for 'god', which in Sanskrit is *deva*. It goes back

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to proto-Indo-European times, and is descended from one of the most firmly established verbal roots of the original Indo-European language. This root is *deiw*, meaning 'to shine', and the word for a god is *deiwos*, meaning 'those who shine'. The word survived in Germanic as *Tiwaz*, in Old English as *Tiw* or *Tig*, and in Old Norse as *Tyr*. In Sanskrit, *deva*, Latin *deus*, and Greek *theos* the old form of the word is supposed to have remained virtually unchanged. Between Greek and Sanskrit there is the well-known homologue between *Zeus pater* and *Dyaus pitr*.

Equally well established is the Indo-European character of one of the most important words in Hindu ritual, namely, *hav (an)*, which means 'to pour libations', and from which the word *hotṛ*—the priest who pours the libation—is derived. The original Indo-European root for pouring is *gheu*, which has given *khein* to Greek, *fundere* to Latin, and *geotan* to Old English.

A third important word in the Hindu religious vocabulary is *sraddhā*, which means 'faith' and from which the word *srāddha*, the Hindu religious ceremony of showing respect to dead ancestors, has come, and this word is also Indo-European. Its Latin homologue is *credere*, 'to believe', of which *credo* is the most familiar derivative. The Sanskrit word has its corresponding form in Avestan, it is *zrazda*, and bears the same meaning. Even the word *Veda* goes back to the Indo-European root which in its various forms have given 'wisdom' and 'wit' to English, 'vision' to English as well as to the Romance languages, and *idea* to Greek. These examples should be enough to illustrate the descent of the Hindu religious vocabulary from the original Indo-European language as it was before the different groups of the dialects developed.

Worship of Light

I shall next consider the derivation of two of the most basic features of the Hindu religious consciousness which could not have originated in India, but must have come from some cold region, as I have already stated; or to be more specific, from the assumed original habitat of the people who spoke the Indo-European languages, that is, the Eurasian plain from the Danube to the Volga. These features are worship of light and worship of fire.

An ecstatic attitude to light is the most striking feature of the most rarefied religious sentiment of the Hindus. It might be called

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mysticism in a loose way. Again and again we find an exultant veneration of light, in which light is identified with *Atman*, the Oversoul, which is the final reality or even the only real existence, and light is regarded as the only manifestation accessible to the senses of an entity which otherwise is attributeless. The best-known example of this feeling is the prayer in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:*

A-sato mā sad gamaya,
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, .
mṛtyor mā(a)mṛtam gamaya.

Lead me from non-being to being,
Lead me from darkness to light,
Lead me from death to immortality.

Br. Up. 3.28

And certainly the most exultant and beautiful identification of *Atman* with light is to be found in the famous verse of the *Katha Upanishad:*

Na tatra suryo bhāti, na candra-tārakan-
nema vidyuto bhānti, kuto(a)yamagniḥ,
tameva bhāntam anubhāti sarvam-
tasya bhāsā sarvam idam vibhāti.

There the sun shines not, nor the moon and stars,
Nor those lightnings, not to speak of fire,
It's only when he shines that after him shine all,
It is his refulgence which makes all things shine.

This answer is given in reply to a question whether the *Atman* itself shines or only reflects light received from other sources. Simply put, the statement means that the Oversoul does not need to be lighted up by any known source of light, but is its own source of light and all else only reflects its light. There is an extraordinary resonance in this verse, and it convinces not by the meaning of the words alone, but by the passion with which they seem to be charged. In contrast, Saṃkara's comment on this verse in his *Vashya* of the Upanishad is pedestrian construing. Clearly, by his time the exultant mysticism of the old Aryan had become mere philosophizing or even logic-chopping.

The actual Sanskrit words employed in referring to light also have a deep significance. The common Sanskrit word for light is *aloka*, 'that by which one sees'. It is not used in religious contexts,

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where the words are *jyoti* or *bhas*, which mean the radiance or refulgence of light, i.e. its dazzling luminosity. The employment of the word *jyoti* without any philosophical association is also found in the *Rig-Veda* and other Vedas.

Such a sense of light and the elaboration of this sensation into a spiritual experience could never have originated in India, where light becomes glare by eight o'clock in the morning. In northern India, the region in which Hindu culture reached its full development, even at morning and evening light is only soft, and never luminous. The whole idea of refulgence as a source of joy would be foreign to India. One would naturally associate it with the aurora borealis. Perhaps such an association of ideas made a great and very conservative Hindu scholar put forward the theory that the Rig-Vedic Aryans had come from the Arctic region, which was absurd. But the feeling could be acquired further south, though only in a climatic zone where snow falls. I realized this from a personal experience, and I hope an account of it will not be considered more irrelevant to a theory of the origin of the worship of light by the Hindus than Newton's observation of the falling apple and Watts's of the boiling kettle.

At the end of 1970 I was working on this book in a village near Oxford, and on Christmas night it began to snow. Till then I had never seen snow, and I felt excited. Up to bed-time snow fell only in flakes like down, and the fall was not heavy. But when I woke up the next morning very early I saw a very bright light coming through a chink in the curtains, as if there was a brilliant moonlit night outside. The illusion of moonlight was so strong that I ran to the south side of the house to look at the setting full moon, completely forgetting that I had seen the crescent moon the previous day and knew that the new moon was only two days away.

Of course, there was no moon, and the sky was one unbroken pall of grey. No light was coming from anywhere above, for neither the house nor the cypress before it was casting any shadow. At last I realized that the light was rising from the ground, which was covered with snow. It was a mass of dazzling white, and its radiance was stretching to the sky. I wondered how a reflecting surface could throw up light when there was none perceptible to the eye from any source above. But the light must have been present in the sky, and the snow-covered ground was reflecting it

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with an incredible intensity. The snow seemed to have converted the earth, which is only a reflector of light, into a source of light in itself.

This refulgence, which was the product of a strange reversal of roles between the sky and the earth, at once gave me an explanation of the feeling for light in our Upanishads. The realization was so decisive that I at once sent an article to a paper in India offering an explanation of the verses of the Upanishad I have quoted above. I put forward the theory that the Indo-Aryans had formulated their association between light and religion from what they saw on the snow-covered plains of their original home, probably in south Russia, and took it with them to India where it was an intrusion.

There is also in Vedic literature another beautiful evocation of light, which is poetic and religious at the same time. This is found in all the descriptions of Ushas (personified dawn), corresponding to Aurora in Latin and Eos in Greek, as the anthropomorphic embodiment of the first appearance of daylight. Now, the physical phenomenon as described in a personified form in the *Rig-Veda* is not normally seen in northern India, where dawn is a reddish flush without radiance. Something like the Vedic dawn can be seen in Bengal and other parts of India where the monsoons are strong. But the Vedas were put in their final shape almost certainly in the Punjab, or in the region between the Sutlej and the Jumna, and not in eastern India. Thus it would seem that the image of the Vedic Ushas was brought into India by the Aryans from a region where such mornings are a visible climatic phenomenon.

There is, however, one association with light in Vedic literature which must be an Indian extension of the original notion of light derived from a cold northern region. It is the very unexpected association of light with night. In the religious and ethical writings of the Hindus darkness *(tamas)* is associated with all that is low and degraded in human nature, and *tamas* is declared to be the lowest *guna* or attribute of nature. But this *tamas* is not an attribute of night. In the religious consciousness of the Hindus there is no place for the Christian notion that night is the time when the powers of evil are abroad.

The Sanskrit word for night is *rātri*. In a personified form, night as Ratri is described in Vedic literature as the sister of Ushas

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(Dawn), who is the destroyer of darkness. As the *Rig-Veda* has it, 'the two are twins *(yāmia)*, and are robed in different colours – for one bright and for the other black. The Dark and the Red are two sisters *(svasārau)*.' This combination is deliberate, and not accidental or casual. In the *Rig-Veda* the word *svasr* (sister) is applied thirteen times to deities, and in eleven cases it is applied either to Ushas or to Ratri. These are an inseparable couple. In the dual *svasārau*, the word is applied five times, three times to Ushas and Ratri, and twice to the earth and the sky. Both Ushas and Ratri belong indivisibly to *Ṛta*, the righteous order of the universe.

The occurrence of another word is also significant. It is *Vibhāvari*, 'the radiant'. In the earlier contexts it means 'dawn', but was later extended to stand almost exclusively for the starlit sky. Those who have seen the starlit sky of northern India will have no difficulty in understanding how a word first applied to dawn came to be used for night. At first it stood for light at its most luminous, and afterwards for light at its softest.

Last of all, attention must be drawn to a significant contrast. In the whole of Sanskrit literature there is no pleasant association with the sun's rays or light. The word for direct sunlight, which is connected only with heat, is *raudra*, which as an adjective means angry, fierce, terrible. What is always emphasized is the oppressiveness of the heat of the sun. A woman who has exposed herself to the sun is described as a wilted flower. That the Hindu wedding can never take place in daytime, is surely connected with the general attitude to daylight. This is a product of India, and the Sun god of Hinduism, who is drawn by seven horses, is a god from a different world.

Worship of Fire

Another feature of Hinduism which connects it with a cold climate is the supreme place held in it by fire. This is particularly noticeable in the earliest stage. In the *Rig-Veda* the hymns to Agni, i.e. personified and deified fire (= *ignis* in Latin, *ognji* in Old Slavonic, and reconstructed as *egnis* in the original Indo-European), exceed those addressed to all the other gods with the sole exception of Indra. Agni derives his importance from his connection with sacrifices. But the place fire occupies in ritual will be dealt with later,

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when considering the similarities between Hindu and Roman religious rituals. Here only the Hindu's idea of fire and his veneration for it will be described.

For man everywhere fire has three aspects: the destructive, the useful, and the comforting. The most obvious of these is the first, which must have been perceived before the others, and the Hindus were perfectly conscious of that. Some Rig-Vedic verses speak of fire's awful anger, and describe how it shears off great forests as if with a razor. But this aspect became submerged in the general feeling of the beneficent utility of fire as a means of production.

The *Kausitaki Brahmana* of the *Rig-Veda* (1.1) actually describes how the dangerous and the benign aspect of fire were separated. At first, the book says, both the gods and men were in the world. But in migrating to heaven the other gods asked Agni to remain on earth to be the overseer of the world on their behalf. Agni questioned how that could be since he was dangerous and therefore was not honoured by men. What happened after that I give in the actual words of the *Brahmana:*

> The gods said, 'The dread forms of thee as such we deposit apart, and then thou be here for man with that form of thine which is auspicious, helpful, and worthy of sacrifice.' Then in the waters they placed his blowing form, in the wind the purifying, in the sun the bright. Then with his auspicious, helpful, and sacrificial forms he burnt here for men. These indeed are the forms of Agni.

It is difficult to discover what personified and deified fire is not from the references to him in Vedic and other early religious texts of the Hindus. Agni is the immortal who has taken up his abode with mortals as their guest; he is the domestic priest who comes with dawn; he is the most adorable of sacrificers; he is a great sage; he is the wise man among the foolish; he is father, king, ruler, banner, and outward manifestation; he is a brilliant guest in every house; he is friendly to mankind and despises no man; some of his worshippers claim a hereditary friendship with him. As a god, fire is addressed with a bewildering variety of admiring and affectionate appellations.

Agni's relations with his worshippers is always benevolent. His worshippers prosper, they become wealthy, and they live long. Agni is the deliverer and friend of man, the man who comes to him with fine horses, gold, and a chariot full of riches. He watches

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with a thousand eyes over the man who brings him food and nourishes him with libations. He gives riches, which he abundantly commands. He also confers immortality and is its guardian and Lord.

The highest godly functions are assigned to Agni. He is called the divine monarch, and is declared to be as strong as Indra. His greatness exceeds that of heaven, and all the worlds. He knows the recesses of heaven, the divine ordinations, and the races of gods and men, as well as the secrets of mortals.

All these are only a selection from the attributes of Agni singled out in the Hindu scriptures for praise. Such an enthusiasm and admiration for fire could not have been the product of a tropical country. The Hindu ascetics who sit on fire to inflict self-motification on themselves exhibit the natural, geographically conditioned approach to it. The old religious attitude of the Hindus to fire is akin to that of the Romans and Persians. In all of them this must have come from a common habitat.

Ritual

The elaborate rituals of the Vedic religion, which have continued in a more or less modified form down to this day and which constitute the most obligatory part of the religion of the Hindus, furnish the most decisive evidence for its Indo-European character. However, these cannot be traced to their origins, but can be demonstrated at one remove by comparing the Brahmanic rituals with the Roman. This in no way weakens the evidence because in respect of ritual both the Hindus and the Romans were extremely conservative and tenacious, so that even when the beliefs and cults were transformed, the rites remained true to type. Moreover, there can be no question of the similarities being the result of later contacts. These must be referred back to a common origin in a prehistoric past.

The parallelisms are very striking, and the first of these is seen in the rite of sacrifice. The *yajna* is the major rite in Hinduism, so is *sacrificium* in Roman religion. In Hinduism the Creator himself began the work of creation with a sacrifice. The purpose of sacrifice among both the peoples was the same. Primarily, it was to obtain and secure worldly welfare of every kind. But, in addition, there is in both the idea of some kind of magical efficacy, and,

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above all, the notion of consecration. The Latin word *sacrificare* exactly means that, i.e. 'to make something sacred'. Though the Brahmanic word does not mean the same thing, the texts throughout suggest that sacrifice is the means of raising all that is profane to the sacred plane. It is not only that the status of the sacrificial victim is changed by it, this happens also with the status of the man on whose behalf the sacrifice is performed. The victim establishes the connection between the profane and the sacred, and the sacrificing priest represents both the sacrificer and the gods.

There is also a striking similarity between the Brahmanic and the Roman sacrifice as regards the species of animals to be sacrificed, with only one difference. The sacrificial animals of the Hindus, arranged according to their importance in respect of the result from the sacrifice, are the following: man, horse, bull, ram, and goat. For animal sacrifice the Romans had the horse, bull, ram, and hog (instead of goat). The Roman sacrifice of *suovetaurilia* was similar to the Vedic *Sautramani* sacrifice to Indra.[1] There was some difference between the Hindus and the Romans in respect of human sacrifice.

In Hindu rituals a man was sacrificed because he was the first among animals, and thus he had precedence over the other animals.[2] The Romans excluded human sacrifice from the national cults. But there is historical evidence for the practice among them. The last human sacrifice in public in Rome took place in 216 B.C. after the disaster of Cannae, where a Roman army was annihilated by Hannibal. Usually, at Roman human sacrifices a couple (a man and a woman) were sacrificed. But in 216, due to the gravity of the crisis, two couples—two Gauls and two Greeks—were sacrificed. It is believed by scholars that the practice continued secretly, and in any case it was formally interdicted by a *senatus consultum* of 97 B.C. But popular superstition regarded the vanquished gladiator as the sacrificed animal. In Hinduism, human sacrifice in more than one form continued till perhaps the middle of the nineteenth century, and during British

[1] The comparison is elaborate, for which see Dumézil, *Tarpeia* (1947), pp. 117–58.

[2] *Satapatha Brahmana* has it: 'Sa etān panca paśun apaśyat—puruṣam, aśvam, gām, avim, ajam . . . Puruṣam prathamam alabhate, puruṣo hi prathamah paśunām . . .' There was human sacrifice in both Norse and German religions.

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rule common people would never believe that a bridge was successfully built without human sacrifice.[1]

The second parallel between Hindu and Roman ritual is to be found in the separation between private and public rites. In Rome the two were placed in two categories: *sacra privata* and *sacra publica*. Among the Hindus the injunctions for the domestic rites were laid down in the *Grihya Sutras* (from *griha* = *domus*) and for the public in the *Srauta Sutras*. In their different ways both were equally important. The domestic rites ensured the safety and welfare of the home in both societies, and in both it was the head of the family—*grihapati* of the Hindus and *pater familias* of the Romans—who was in charge of these duties. It is unnecessary to give details of the public rites. They were equally ceremonious and gorgeous in both societies.

The object of propitiation in both were the great gods of each people, so far as the public rites were concerned, and the procedure varied for the different gods as also did the names of the sacrifices. In the private rites the objects of the sacrifices were the gods or spirits who were specially associated with private life. They were not identical in the two societies, but their nature was similar. The Roman private sacrifices were concerned with the *Penates*, *Lares*, *Genius*, and also *Manes*. The Hindu domestic rites were five in number: they were called the 'five sacrifices', and were performed for five classes of beings: the gods, all living creatures, the ancestors, men as a special group of living creatures, and the Vedas, as personified things. All these had to be offered oblations with unfailing and meticulous regularity. The performance of the domestic rites could be a heavy burden, but neither the Hindus nor the Romans could neglect them for this reason. As the Romans said, the *privatus* who failed became *impius*.

Moreover, both societies laid the strongest possible emphasis on the correctness of the invocations, utterance of the incantations faultlessly, appropriate gestures, and also adornment of the sacri-

[1] I am not speaking here of human sacrifice as seen among the aboriginals or criminal tribes and communities, but of the sacrifice in connection with certain cults by either the Tantric Kapaliks or by very wealthy people to ensure the permanence and increase of their wealth. As to the association with bridge building, see Kipling's story of *The Bridge-Builders*. In any case, deaths by accident during construction were always regarded as a *quid pro quo* exacted by the divine river. The lascar Peroo said in the story: 'As for the bridge, so many have died in the building that it cannot fail.'

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ficial animal. In Rome the animal was often decorated with bands and had the horns gilded, among the Hindus it had to be bathed and decorated with vermilion and garlands. *(paśum snāpitam sinduramālyādyalaṃkṛtam)*.The place of sacrifice, whether permanent or temporary, was sacred to both the peoples, and at the time of sacrifice, among both, there had to be silence *(Favete linguis!)* or music.

Another parallel between Hinduism and Roman religion is seen in the domestic religious obligations laid down by both. These were, first, the performance of a series of prescribed rites for the main events of a man's life from birth to death, and, secondly, the service of regular oblations to the departed ancestors. With both the peoples, the first group of rites were almost sacraments. With both, a period of seven or eight days after the birth of a child in the family were unclean days, and a purification ceremony was performed at the end of the period. Among the Romans, as among the Hindus, the initiation and marriage were very important. The Romans had these features in their wedding ceremony: joining of hands; invocation of the gods of the household and of the conjugal goddesses, especially Juno; sacrifice; and circumambulation of the altar presenting the right side. These are similar to what is done in the Hindu ceremony. The Hindus had ten of these ceremonies, some details of which will be given later.

As to dead ancestors, they had to be remembered in both societies with analogous rites, which consisted in offering oblations at regular intervals, and also on important occasions. For instance, no Hindu wedding could take place unless it had been preceded by oblations to the dead ancestors, which were known as *ābhyudayika*. Among the Hindus, as among the Romans, the continuity of the service to the dead had to be maintained from generation to generation, and therefore the continuation of the male line of descent was essential. The Romans in their attitude to their dead ancestors always assumed that the *manes* weighed on the living with the burden of an undefined disquiet. This was the case with the Hindus as well. That, due to some cause not within their control, the oblations for the ancestors might cease, was a terror with the departed as well as their living descendants. This was called the calamity of *pindalopa*.

But the most striking resemblance between Hinduism and the Roman religion is to be found in regard to fire—in the ritual

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obligation to maintain fire both in public and private life. For the Romans, the hearth, which they called *focus*, was the centre of the home. Its shape was round, and it is supposed that this conformed to the shape of the primitive mud hut. From this the modern meaning of the word as 'a central point' has been derived. There was also a portable hearth called the *foculus*.

The hearth among the Romans was the most holy and necessary feature of the home. Its fire was regarded as divine. It was the duty of the master of the house to maintain the fire in the hearth continuously, and it could not go out without harm for the family. Furthermore, every day and for every meal there had to be sacrifices to it. At the new moon, first quarter, and the full moon, it was festooned with flower garlands. At night the fire was covered with cinders and re-lighted in the morning.

Among the ancient Hindus, too, the establishment and maintenance of the household fire was a strict religious obligation. The inauguration of a new household, which naturally was coincident with marriage, was marked by the lighting of a new fire by its master, the newly married man. He thus became *sāgnika* (possessed of fire) and attained to the status of a householder *(grihapati)*, recognized both by religion and society. The fire had to be maintained perpetually, and if the householder went on a journey the responsibility for doing that passed to his representative. On the death of a householder, his son re-lighted it. In the home oblations were offered on it.

In both societies the public fires were equally important. Among the Hindus the whole contract between men and the gods rested on the fire sacrifices. Their cessation meant its collapse, and as a result dire calamities in the worldly order. In ancient times the Hindu kings saw to it that the great public sacrifices were performed frequently and with due splendour. Among the Romans it was the Republic which had this responsibility. The State had its eternal fire, which was tended by the Vestals. It could not go out without endangering Rome. There were in addition fires in or before the temples.

There was also a close relation between the public and the private fire among both peoples. The two fires could never be disassociated. This connection was most clearly seen in the fire sacrifices of the Hindus. The arrangements for the *yajnas* in the open were strictly prescribed. The two fires had to be at two ends

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of an east-to-west axis, and the public fire was at the eastern end, the distance between the two depending on the caste of the sacrificer. The public fire was called the *āhavaniya* and the private *gārhapatya*. In this arrangement there was also a third but minor fire, placed to the south of the axis and called the *dakshināgni*. The Romans had the first two fires in the same form, and the third in a somewhat different form.

The shape of the altars for the fires was both important and significant. In the Hindu arrangement the private fire was circular and the public rectangular, and the southern fire was semicircular, with the diametrical line to the north.

The Romans maintained this convention of shapes, as was seen in its most striking exhibition in the Forum Romanum. The eternal Vestal fire was the private fire of the whole nation, and therefore its temple was circular. Built under Augustus, reconstructed by Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, and recently restored, it stands adjacent to the Atrium of the Vestals in the Forum. The public fires were in or just outside the great rectangular temples. The shapes and arrangements were symbolic. Among the Hindus it was explicitly stated: the private fire was the earth and this world, and the public the sky and the other world. The explanation was the same in the case of the Romans.

Religious Concepts and the Pantheon

The Indo-European character of Hindu religious concepts can be demonstrated by means of comparisons, not only with Rome, but all the Indo-European peoples before they adopted Christianity as their religion. The subject is, however, very large, and is, in fact, the whole content of comparative mythology combined with comparative religion, each of which has an immense literature. Here only the most important common elements will be set forth, and that, too, has to be done very briefly.

The most primitive Indo-European notion of a divine order is perhaps the idea of the bright sky as a non-anthropomorphic deity. The Greek Zeus Pater, the Latin Jupiter, and the Sanskrit Dyaus Pitr, all embody it. The original Persian religion also appears to have been of this kind, to judge by what Herodotus had to say about it, and on this subject he was hardly likely to have gone wrong. He wrote:

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I am aware that the Persians practise the following customs. They are not in the habit of erecting images, temples, or altars; indeed, they charge those who do so with folly, because, I suppose they do not like the Greeks hold the gods to be of human shape. Their practice is to climb the highest mountains and sacrifice to Zeus, by which name they call the whole circle of the sky. They sacrifice also to the sun and moon, the earth, fire, and water, and the winds. These and these alone are their original objects of worship.[1]

A. B. Cook in his great book *Zeus* observes:

> Personally I should not refuse the term *religious* to the attitude of reverential fear with which I suppose early man to have approached the animate sky. Indeed, it would not be absurd to maintain that the pre-anthropomorphic conception was not in some respects the higher, because more true than the later anthropomorphism.[2]

The description of Herodotus suggests that the Persians shared the general Indo-European attitude of regarding all natural phenomena as divine. This feeling is certainly responsible for creating many gods of the Hindu pantheon. The deification of natural phenomena, which is so pronounced a feature of Hinduism, was also present among the Greeks. All Indo-European peoples, including the Greeks, Hindus, and others, deified not only the great natural phenomena, but also smaller ones like rivers and streams.[3] This lies behind not only the Hindu pantheism, but also the animism which is so strongly felt in the religion.

In one respect early Hinduism, i.e. Vedic Brahmanism which continued as a parallel strand in later Hinduism, went back to an older stratum of the Indo-European religion than did Greek or Roman religion. This is seen in the fact that the earliest Hindus knew neither temples nor images, and were like the Germans in respect of giving locations on earth to their gods and rites. They always worshipped in sacred or sanctified places. The Germans also did that. Tacitus related that they did not confine their gods within walls, and did not make images of them, but consecrated forests and groves, and invested them with that hidden power *(secretum)*, which they saw only with the reverence of their eyes.

[1] Herodotus Bk. 1, Ch. 131 (Cook's translation).
[2] A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (1914), vol. 1, p. 13.
[3] On a Syracusan gold coin of *c.* 460 B.C. the river Arethusa is shown as a goddess. In the same manner the rivers Yamuna and Ganga in India had their iconography.

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The Romans and the Greeks also had these feelings, but since they had taken over temples and image worship from the Egyptians and the peoples of Asia, the deification of nature remained in their religion as a secondary, but also a living element.

The shift from the non-anthropomorphic, deified nature to the anthropomorphic took place naturally. It transformed the deified sky, the sky god, and endowed it with a special relationship with the earth as mother. And the process was extended to form an anthropomorphic pantheon. The whole process is similar in Hinduism, Roman religion, and Greek religion, but its date cannot be determined.

The completed process is to be seen among all the Indo-European groups, namely, the Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Scandinavians, all of whom have analogous pantheons. The analogy is indisputable, but it would be a mistake to try to establish very precise identifications. It is well known, even though traditionally identifications between the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were accepted, that they are not exactly the same. Zeus is not wholly Jupiter, Hera Juno, Athena Minerva, Hermes Mercury, and so on. The Vedic pantheon presents clear parallels with the Greek, Roman, German, and Scandinavian, but these cannot be regarded as identifications. For instance, Zeus, Jupiter, Odinn, Wotan, Thor present similarities with Indra, but they are also different in important respects. The divergences are certainly due to particular evolution after the dispersion of the original community.

However, as anthropomorphic gods, they present common human characteristics, irrespective of the pantheon to which they belong. All the gods and goddesses are heroic men and women, with all the virtues and failings, especially amorousness, of the heroic age. They are intoxicated with power, domineering, jealous, combative, sensual. These traits are to be found as much in the *Mahabharata* as in the *Iliad*. But in respect of the character and behaviour of the gods the picture drawn in the Hindu epics and Puranas is closer to that found in Norse mythology than in the Greek or Roman. There are strange analogies in details. Freyja, the goddess of fertility and very lascivious as such, exhibits an excitability as the mistress of Odinn which is like that of Indrani (Sachi) with Indra in the *Rig-Veda*. She also rides in a chariot drawn by cats, which is symbolic because they are so prolific. The

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Hindu goddess of fertility, Sasthi, also rides them. There is also an analogy between the story of the seizure of mead by Odinn and the story of the quarrel between Indra and the Nasatyau, which was ended by cutting a monster named Mada (which means wine or alcohol) to make alcohol, just as the blood of Kvasir was brewed into mead. It is only in the Indo-European pantheons that the divinities have these aristocratic human characteristics. In the Mesopotamian and Egyptian pantheons, and especially the latter, the gods and goddesses have an altogether different character: they are supra-human, majestic, inscrutable, grave, and yet benign with a faint suggestion of a smile on their lips.

But the basic oneness of all the Indo-European pantheons is to be found not in these similarities in details, which are numerous, but in the structure and organization of the society and hierarchy of the gods and goddesses. In regard to this I have fully accepted the theory of Dumézil that all these pantheons have a tripartite organization reflecting the organization of the Indo-European communities. Taking the social organization of the ancient Hindus as the full development of the original Indo-European pattern, he says that all these societies had a tripartite structure, consisting of two classes, the priests and the warriors, and the masses, i.e. the people in general represented in Hindu society by the caste known as the Vaisyas, who carried on the general economic activities of the society.[1] As can be easily seen, this division is functional. In the same way, according to Dumézil's theory, the pantheon, i.e. the society of the gods, is tripartite or divided into three classes—the sovereign gods who control the world by magical powers, the warrior gods who fight the demons and other enemies of the divine and human orders, and the economic gods who maintain the economic activities and also ensure the continuation of the species. Dumézil has worked out this pattern in all the known Indo-European societies and their pantheons.

His theory has been rejected by some scholars, more especially in Britain. But the rebuttal is very unconvincing, and it does not

[1] The worst mistake about Hindu social organization is to regard the Vaisya caste as a trading caste on the strength of present practice. In the *Dharma Sastras* and certainly also in practice in ancient times the Vaisyas pursued three vocations, namely, agriculture, trade, and cattle-raising (*krishi, vanijya, goraksha*, as the *Gita* has it.) Even the name *Vaisya* is derived from *Vis* which means 'the populace in general'.

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seem to me that Dumézil's opponents have taken full stock of his theory. Certain scholars have pointed out that a tripartite division of society is not exclusive to the Indo-Europeans, but can be found among other people. This is only to draw attention to the obvious. The really important consideration is that the three divisions are worked out most thoroughly and have remained most stable in the Indo-European societies. It is seen not only in the organization of Hindu society but also in the organization of the British parliament on the basis of three orders, which is paralleled in the French States General. Even more important is the fact that it is only in Indo-European societies that the entire pantheon reflects human society. Nowhere else has any pantheon been created in the image of the worshipping society. In the Hindu pantheon of even a late age these three classes of gods were grouped into classes known as the Adityas, Rudras, and Vasus.

It is only in the association of a god with a particular function that the Indo-European societies differ, and not in the fundamental grouping. For instance, Zeus and Jupiter present features analogous to those of Indra, but they cannot be regarded as the Greek or Roman counterparts of the Hindu god even in their earliest forms. Their later evolution was wholly different. But the distribution of the functions among the individual gods is the result of a very complex process, conditioned by many unknown factors. What cannot be ignored is the broad unity of the patterns of the pantheons. This is analogous in all of them. And indeed no serious scholar has disputed the original Indo-European character of Hinduism. But its evolution after the arrival of the Aryans in India has been differently viewed. So, that process has to be considered by way of concluding the discussion of the historical development of Hinduism.

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Chapter Four

WHAT HAPPENED IN INDIA

TO conclude the historical investigation of Hinduism an attempt will be made to indicate in a very sketchy outline the evolution which the religion of the Indo-European colonists underwent in India from their first arrival down to the Muslim conquest. This is a period of something like two thousand years, the first thousand of which must be regarded as prehistoric. In speculating about the development of Hinduism during this stage the historian has no archaeological data, but only a body of texts attributed to this period. But it must be remembered that this account is wholly conjectural. Besides, the account of the development of Hinduism offered here is more concerned with the types of religious experience than with chronology.

The first difficulty is to discover what the very starting point was. With what beliefs and practices did the Aryans come to India? The conventional answer to the question is that they had the Vedic religion. Now, the so-called Vedic religion is itself only a theoretical reconstruction from the four Vedic *Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas*, and it cannot be regarded as a coherent religion practised at any particular point of time. Even the *Rig-Veda* by itself shows a good deal of stratification. Some of the beliefs found in it could only have originated after the settlement of the Aryans in India, others belonged to their pre-Indian existence, and were already obsolete when they came into the country. The whole of the Vedic corpus shows greater heterogeneity. The *Rig-Veda* suggests rituals which are not identical with those in the formal ritualistic treatises, the *Brahmanas*, and the *Brahmanas* differ among themselves. So the Vedic corpus must be regarded as a canonical embodiment of beliefs and practices which had developed over a fairly long period of time.

Nor should the ideas and rites which have been described as the Indo-European core of the religion in the last chapter be taken as the starting point, for the account consisted of only a selection made from features found in the texts as well as practices which could be traced back inferentially to a hypothetical Indo-Euro-

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pean past, and which at the same time remained living for ages in India.

Nevertheless, the Vedic literature certainly gives some idea of the beliefs and practices of Hinduism in the early centuries of Aryan colonization. This primitive Hinduism is very different from what is revealed by the historical evidence summarized in Chapter 2. But this transformation, fundamental as it might seem, is neither unnatural nor exceptional in the history of religion. The archaic Roman religion was not the Roman religion of the Empire; Buddhism did not remain the simple teaching of Buddha; the Zoroastrian cult is not the creation of Zarathustra; Taoism is not the doctrine of Lao-tse; finally, Christianity *today* contains much more than the original teaching of Jesus and even that of the Apostles. Hinduism underwent far more drastic changes. The only religion in the world which has remained very close to the first message of the founder is Islam.

The Way of Knowledge—its Origin

The first change that the Indo-European form of Hinduism underwent since its unknown origins was the shift from a non-anthropomorphic concept of the supreme deity to an anthropomorphic concept. This must have taken place very early, probably in Persia, because the existence of an anthropomorphic polytheism there is attested by indications which have survived in Zoroastrian literature. The change did not totally destroy the old notion of a non-anthropomorphic deity symbolized by the bright sky and daylight, but the survival took three different forms in three religions—the Greek, the Persian, and the Hindu.

The Greeks made the Zeus who was identified with the sky and daylight wholly anthropomorphic, but placed him in the ether, and gave him a special name, Zeus Aitherios. In Hellenistic art Zeus Aitherios was represented with a blue nimbus, blue globe, and blue mantle. Zeus also retained his association with light as Zeus Lykaios (connected with light rather than with wolf, though there was also a special wolf-Zeus). The Greek philosophers, however, seem to have remained attached to the idea of impersonality. Heraclitus used the term Zeus Aitherios as the equivalent of the serene sky. The impersonal idea was pursued by other philosophers in different ways, e.g. by the Stoics and the Eclectics.

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In Persia the pre-anthropomorphic sky-god certainly became Ahura Mazda, who is ambivalent between anthropomorphism and impersonality.

The Hindus took a different line altogether. They did not abandon the pre-anthropomorphic deity at all, but put him in a parallel channel of their religious life with their anthropomorphic polytheism. This is the famous Way of Knowledge or *Gnosis (Jnana Marga)*, in which a formless, attributeless, eternal, and infinite deity is the object of mystical contemplation. In other words, the notion of *Brahman* or *Atman* was the continuation of the old non-anthropomorphic idea, and so far as the Way of Knowledge survives among the Hindus it has remained non-anthropomorphic.

This makes the individual soul in the *Jnana Marga* basically different from what it is in Christianity. In the latter, even when liberated from the body, it remains a psychological person, an individual entity. The idea that there was a soul *(psyche* or *anima)* residing in the body and quite distinct from it, originated at the human end, and after the death of the man in whose body it was residing it became only a disembodied projection of the same human personality, which remained quite distinct from the Divine personality. The human, in fact the bodily origin of the notion of soul is clearly indicated by the words in the Christian vocabulary which stand for a non-corporeal psychological person, viz., *nephesh* in Hebrew, *ruach* in Aramaic, *pneuma* in Greek, *spiritus* in Latin, *ghost* in the old English sense. All of these had the primary meaning of breath.

Not so in the Way of Knowledge of Hinduism. In it the idea of the individual human soul originated at the cosmic end, and was a reduction of the notion of an Oversoul, which itself came from the conception of an all-pervasive non-anthropomorphic divinity. The human soul was only the microcosm of an infinite macrocosm, and its separate existence was like the confinement of a part of the atmosphere within a pot. Moreover, when it left the human body it also ceased to have any separate existence. Actually, it ceased, not only to be a psychological entity, but also to have any attributes accessible to the human mind. The conception of the soul in the rest of Hinduism is so confused and contradictory that it is hardly possible to say what it is or is not.

It is clear from the tone of its literature that the Way of Know-

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ledge was truly religious in origin and remained religious for a long time. It may have been so in the age of the *Gita*, which proclaimed a personal God of love, for Krishna is made to reconcile the Way of Knowledge with the Way of Love. In the twelfth chapter of the book the following dialogue takes place between him and Arjuna:

Arjuna: There are those who worship you with love, and there are others who worship the imperishable and unmanifest. Of these, who are the better in religious discipline?

Krishna: I hold them to be most disciplined who worship me with supreme faith, but they also attain me who worship the imperishable, undefinable, unmanifest, omnipresent, unthinkable, immovable, and unchanging.[1]

But the mystical contemplation or realization of the imponderable *Atman* (the unmanifested ultimate reality) came to an end in religious life and passed into philosophy. The transition was completed in any case by the time of Samkara (usually placed at the beginning of the ninth century), as can be seen from the position he took about 'It' in his commentaries on the Upanishads. One example may be given. It is his interpretation of the famous stanza which describes the means of attaining the *Atman* (literally, how 'It' is *obtainable* = *labhya*). The *Mundaka Upanishad*, in which the stanza occurs, says that 'It' cannot be obtained by *pravachana* (discussion or instruction), nor by *medhā* (intellectual capacity), nor by *bahu śruta* (much hearing of the sacred texts): 'It' reveals 'Its' form *(tanu)* only to that man whom 'It' chooses *(vṛṇute)*. Now, no ambiguity is left by the grammatical construction of the sentence that it is the *Atman* which both chooses and reveals. That is to say, no human effort can ensure 'Its' attainment, and whether 'It' will be realized by any human being depends on 'It' alone.

But not so for Samkara. By one of those extraordinary distortions of grammar and lexicon which is usual with him, he interprets the passage to mean that the *Atman* is attainable by a man if he is eager enough in seeking knowledge. One would not say that Samkara's opinion is only intellectual and not religious—but still,

[1] Here the purport is given. For the whole dialogue see *Gita*, 12.1–5. I give the original of the crucial lines:

Ye tv akṣaram anirdeśyam/ avyaktaṃ paryupāsate,
sarvatragam acintyaṃ ca/ kūṭastham acalaṃ druvam . . .
te prāpnuvanti mām eva . . .

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the *Atman* is brought within the reach of human effort, human will, and human aspiration. This is a break with the entire Upanishadic mysticism.

When this stage was reached the Way of Knowledge *(Jnana Marga)* of the Hindu religion was bound to pass out of religion, and became the preserve of philosophy. If, in spite of that, the Way did not become purely intellectual that was because, having sprung from religion, Hindu philosophy never became wholly free from it. This fact has led most students to treat Hindu philosophy as if it were a part of Hindu religious life, and to include philosophical discussion in the treatment of the religion.

Polymorphous Monotheism

Thus Vedic ritualism and Vedic mysticism seem to have continued side by side, and we know nothing of any new development until a new type of cult with Siva and Vishnu-Krishna as alternative deities is seen emerging in the first century B.C. But, though the process cannot be described, its outcome is known. When completed, it resulted in the creation of gods who were not at all like the personal gods of the Greek and Roman religions. Siva and Vishnu-Krishna of this new Hinduism are not to be compared even to the supreme gods of these two pantheons, Zeus and Jupiter. The two Hindu gods were more like the monotheistic God of the historic religions, and had some of their attributes. But there were also two very important differences. First, instead of one, there were two gods of the monotheistic type, either one of which could be chosen by a votary as his personal god. Secondly, there was no obligation on any Hindu to worship any of them: he was as free to adopt the monotheistic type of cult as he was to select the god for it. But after the adoption, which was usual in practice though not obligatory in doctrine, one or other of these gods became for the worshipper a monotheistic god in a very real sense. I would call this cult polymorphous monotheism, a very special form of monotheism created by the Hindus.

The two gods who figured in it were only minor gods in the Rig-Vedic pantheon. None the less, they supplanted its major gods, e.g. Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Vayu, or Agni. But at some stage a third divinity was added to the two, and it was the Mother Goddess (Durga or Kali), who could be chosen by the worshipper

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as his special monotheistic deity. When exactly she became the third in the polymorphous monotheism cannot be determined. In any case, these three cults, though not obligatory, are the main features of historic Hinduism. Of course, the Vedic rituals continued as their obligatory accompaniment. As these three cults are described at length in the third part of the book, their evolution and character need not be discussed at this point.

But some observations might be made about the order of their appearance. It seems certain that in this polymorphous monotheism, the cult of Siva or Saivism emerged first, and the Vishnu-Krishna cult or Vaishnavism came afterwards as an imitation and duplication. The earlier appearance of Siva is indicated in the first instance by the fact that it is he alone among the Hindu gods who is called Isa or Isvara, which means 'the Lord', and also Mahesvara or Paramesvara, meaning 'Great Lord' or 'Supreme Lord'. Though after its appearance the Vishnu-Krishna combination became as important a monotheistic entity as Siva, neither Vishnu nor Krishna was ever called a rival Lord, but was referred to as Bhagavan (conventionally translated as the 'Blessed One'), and their followers were called Bhagavatas or Vaishnavas.

That the cult of Siva preceded that of Vishnu-Krishna seems also to be borne out by the *Mahabharata*, whose testimony is particularly significant. It must be borne in mind that the monotheistic Vaishnava cult is not that of Vishnu alone, but of Vishnu combined with Krishna, and this Krishna is as much the hero of the *Mahabharata* as the Pandavas. Yet the epic throughout represents him as a man, a heroic and exceptional man, but still a human being and not a god. What is even more significant is that there are many passages in the book which relate incidents in which Krishna is shown as worshipping or begging favours from Siva. He declares himself to be a devotee of Siva as the Supreme Lord, and sees a vision of him as the Lord of the universe which is like the vision which Arjuna had of Krishna in the *Gita*. Furthermore, Krishna receives eight boons from Siva: (1) steadfastness in righteousness, (2) destruction of all his enemies in battle, (3) great renown, (4) great strength, (5) discipline *(yoga)*, (6) amiability, (7) close proximity to Siva, and (8) one thousand sons. This makes Krishna a suppliant, indeed a very human suppliant to Siva as God. Such passages could not have occurred in the *Mahabharata* if, when the epic was given its final shape, Siva had

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not already become a kind of monotheistic god, and Krishna remained a man.[1]

Image Worship in Temples

With the introduction of the new cults of Siva and Vishnu-Krishna, to which was added the cult of the Mother Goddess, Hinduism entered the historic period of its existence. The cults took a few centuries to become fully developed, but by the beginning of the Christian era the first two had taken root. With this also came the greatest revolution in the history of Hinduism—the introduction of image worship in temples, which the religion had not known before. To the outside world and even to non-Hindus in India, Hinduism is identified now with idolatry and temples. Yet the religion had existed without them for one thousand years at least.

Something has already been said about the relationship between the old Hinduism without image worship and the new Hinduism with it, but two points might be repeated; first, not a single text of the revealed scriptures of the Hindus refers to images or temples, and even the epics do not; secondly, like adherence to the cults of Siva, Krishna, or Durga, worship of images in temples is wholly optional.

In addition, attention has to be drawn to two aspects of image worship in temples which show that this new expression of Hinduism has remained, in spite of its universal adoption, only a domiciled foreigner and has flourished apart from the deepest and most natural religious sentiment of the Hindus.

First, the liturgy of worship of the images in temples has not been made religious in the sense Hindu sacrifices and devotions are so. The whole routine of daily worship in temples is only a replica of the daily life of the Hindu king. The god or goddess is awakened in the morning with music or praise, then bathed, dressed, and adorned. After that the deity receives food, and then he gives audience to his subjects, hears their applications, grants their requests figuratively. The applicants, of course, bring

[1] Like all the books embodying Hindu legends and traditions, the *Mahabharata* is not consistent. In a passage following the one summarized here Mahadeva praises Krishna. But though this panegyric gives a few of the attributes of Siva to Krishna, on the whole the praise is given to the Vishnu of mythology.

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their tribute and presents. Then the door is shut for the midday meal and siesta. In the afternoon the god comes to the audience chamber again, but only to be entertained. The whole routine of evening worship is entertainment, in which dances are included. Formerly, many temples had, of course, dedicated woman dancers. The gods also go out like the kings for periodic excursions or visits, and even set out on campaigns. The gods and goddesses also wear costumes and ornaments which are exactly like those of Hindu royalty. In short, there is nothing unworldly in the worship of images in temples. It is based on the Hindu quality of *rajasika*, or regality. The *sattvika*, which is the quality of holiness, has no place in it.

Secondly, and more significantly still, Hindu theorists and apologists have never accepted image worship wholeheartedly. On the contrary, they have asserted that it is not the real Hindu religion. They have consistently represented it only as a substitute for the real thing for simple and uneducated people, to whom the highest expression of Hinduism is too abstruse and thus incomprehensible. This apology I have read and heard all my life.

But it must not be assumed that this line has been taken only in response to the challenge of Christian or secular European ideas in the nineteenth century. It is much older, and is seen fully developed as an argument during Muslim rule which was imposed on India in the thirteenth century. The Muslims charged the Hindus with idolatry—*butparasti*—but instead of being ashamed, the Hindu counter-attacked. I shall give an example of this from an old Bengali poem written around 1750, in which the poet sets forth an argument between the Mogul Emperor Jehangir and a Bengali Brahmin to prove the superiority of Hinduism.

The Emperor says that Hindus make idols of clay, wood, and stone and, by infusing life into these by means of spells, only worship evil spirits. He asks: 'Who can save a people who give life to things made by man and what can be the future life of those who put vermilion on trees and pitchers and call these goddesses?'[1]

The Brahmin replies: 'Clay, wood, or stone, all things movable or immovable contain God according to the Puranas as well as

[1] It is as if the Bengali poet had read St Paul and put his denunciation of idolatry in the mouth of the Muslim Emperor.

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the Quran. He who makes images of Him with these only makes the intangible God tangible. He who contemplates only the intangible without the help of the tangible drops the gold and only ties an empty knot in his scarf.'

Writing more than eight hundred years before this about the highest Hindu conception of God in his famous book on India, the great Muslim scholar Alberuni wrote:

> The beliefs of educated and uneducated people differ in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses . . . The Hindus believe with regard to God that he is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him . . . This is what educated people believe about God . . . If we now pass from the ideas of the educated people among the Hindus to those of common people, we must say that they present a great variety. Some of them are simply abominable, but similar errors also occur in other religions.

Clearly, Alberuni was giving the Hindu view of the relationship between monotheism and polytheism. There is no doubt that in the highest Hindu religious consciousness there were always reservations about giving a material form to God or the gods and to worship the divinity in images. This is paralleled among the Greeks and Romans, and deprecation of image worship in temples can be found in the opinions of the philosophers. This is cited by later Christian writers.

Clement of Alexandria quoted two lines of verse from a fragment attributed to Euripides: 'What house built by carpenters could immure within it the divine body?' To Zeno the Stoic, both Plutarch and Clement attributed the following opinion, set down in almost identical words: 'No one should build temples, for no temple is either precious or holy, no structure made by a mason can be that.' The disapproval is extended to statues *(agalmata)*. A passage in Plato's *Laws* was also interpreted as a disapproval of temples. In it he said: 'When the ground and the hearth of the home have been consecrated to gods why should there be a second consecration (in a temple?) for them?' Cicero put the

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same opinion in Latin as follows: 'Terra igitur, ut focus, domicilium sacrum deorum omnium est. Quocirca ne quis iterum idem consecrato.'[1]

In any case, Eusebius of Caesaria, the historian of the Church, definitely thought that there was no idolatry in the early stage of the Greek religion. Thus he wrote in his *Demonstratio evangelica*:

> In ancient times mortals turned only to the heavenly bodies and ignored idols . . . This is what I proved in the *Praeparatio evangelica*, where I have demonstrated that the most ancient of men did not make use of statues carved by hand . . . So it is time that the Greeks recognized this themselves on the strength of their own texts and admitted that idolatry and the cult of invisible spirits were recent superstitions, absent in the religion of the ancients.

The revulsion from image worship at the highest level of Greek, Roman, and Hindu religious and philosophical thinking, discreetly expressed as it was, was still real, and sprang from a sensation of *malaise*. The reason was the same with all the three people: they were Indo-Europeans with an Indo-European legacy in religion. No Indo-European people made images of their gods, nor worshipped them in temples, though they had created anthropomorphic pantheons. But the anthropomorphism had not affected the basically pantheistic character of their religion, derived from a strong feeling for nature. Their gods were very largely nature gods, and for this reason more appropriately worshipped at sacred spots or in groves. Such gods could not be easily brought into man-made buildings.

Yet anthropomorphism, which created psychological images of gods, was bound to create the desire to give to the psychological image a material form and thus lead to idol worship. This latent tendency in the anthropomorphic Indo-European religions found practical expression first among the Greeks, because they were in close contact with the countries which not only practised image worship in temples, but had also given an overpowering grandeur to their cults. The centres of this type of cult were in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the mere artistic effect of the Egyptian material embodiment of religion must have been overpowering to a nation with such artistic sensibility as the Greeks. Thus Greece became the source of diffusion of the temple cult among all Indo-European

[1] *De Legibus* 4. 18. 45.

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peoples. The Romans took it over from the Greeks. But the Germans were too far away and too primitive to adopt it. The Persians were in direct contact with Mesopotamia and with Egypt as well. But they were protected against the temple cult by their exclusive monotheism. The Hindus, too, were at first too distant to be influenced by it.

But the invasion of Alexander brought the Greeks to the north-western regions of India,[1] and exposed the life and culture of the Hindus to Hellenic influences in many things. The invasion itself was only an episode, but its effects were lasting. First, under the Seleucids the Greeks settled in the whole area as far to the north as the Oxus, and after Persia was lost to the Parthians by the Seleucids, they remained in the Punjab and Afghanistan under local kings, and they kept up their Hellenism for about three hundred years. This Greek presence was a potent cultural influence on the Hindus.

The Greek influence on Hindu culture has always been discounted by Indian scholars from purely nationalistic sentiment. But there can be no doubt that this influence was real. How strongly entrenched Greek culture was in this area can be judged from the fact already referred to that Asoka found it necessary to have his religious message inscribed in Afghanistan in the Greek language. The Greek of the Asokan inscriptions was not a pidgin dialect, but the classical Greek employed by the Greek philosophers. For instance, in order to translate the word *dhamma (dharma)* of the Magadhi Prakrit (the normal language of his inscriptions all over India) his translator used the Greek word *eusebeia*, which is employed even by Plato. It means, on the one hand, 'giving to the gods their dues', and, on the other, also embodies notions of social justice like respect for oaths, filial piety, consideration for parents, and awareness of the fallibility of human beings. These were exactly the virtues Asoka wanted to preach.

Moreover, it was not in language alone that the region was Hellenized. It was more so in the material expression of culture. Thus the Greek colonists not only gave a new artistic representation to Buddhism, but also imported Hellenistic works of art from Egypt, western Asia, and Greece. They must also have had temples,

[1] Geographically, the sub-continent of India extends to the Hindu Kush, and thus in the past it included cis-Hindu Kush Afghanistan.

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and it is no accident that the oldest remains of a temple of the Hindu type has been found in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that the Indo-Aryan culture was extremely weak in material expression, and it acquired that expression only through contact with the Persians in the first instance, and then with the Greeks. This is admitted frankly in Sanskrit literature in respect of architecture. Whenever any marvellous building is mentioned, it is attributed to the Danavas, who are of course the Persians. The adoption of the Greek material expression would naturally follow the imitation of the Persians. There can be no doubt that temples and images were taken over by the Hindus from the Greeks who had settled in what is now Punjab and Afghanistan. This would be perfectly consistent with the general development of architecture and sculpture in ancient India.

Other Developments

After the adoption of temples and images, the next great change in the religion of the Hindus is seen in the introduction of a wholly new feeling for the monotheistic gods. This is the famous Way of Love *(Bhakti Marga)*, which means disinterested surrender of self to a personal god of love. This was so foreign to all the previous religious traditions of the Hindus that it can be reasonably set down to an external influence. This new kind of devotion was first seen in the worship of Krishna, but was extended to Siva as well as the Mother Goddess.

From this point onwards, with one exception, Hinduism developed under its own motive power, that is, along a line of evolution which amplified what had already been received or created. In this process all the three cults of the monotheistic type of gods, namely, those of Siva, Krishna, and the Mother Goddess, reached their full expression. Of these, the cult of Siva remained the least changed. The cult of the Mother Goddess underwent greater changes, and, as it would seem, absorbed one foreign influence. But the cult of Krishna underwent what was virtually a revolution as a result of pressures inherent in the Hindu mind as it had developed in India. All these changes will be discussed in the third part of the book.

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Hinduism and the Aboriginals

Those who are familiar with what is said about the evolution of Hinduism in most of the books current on the subject will have noticed a silence in this chapter which they will consider very strange. It is the absence in the account I have just given of the broad lines of development of the religion, of any reference to the influence which the religions of the aboriginals of India exercised on it. There has grown up a definite school of historians of Hinduism, especially at the popular level, which regards the full-grown religion as the product of an interaction between the Indo-European religion of the incoming Aryans and the religion of the aboriginals of the country. The cults of Siva and Durga, more especially, have been regarded as borrowings in some of their aspects from the aboriginals.

The reason for my exclusion of this view from my account is simply that I consider it as wholly unfounded, and I am convinced that no such interaction ever took place. On this subject a very significant difference is found between academic Western scholars and the British administrators who have written about Hinduism or Hindu social customs. The latter have always singled out the Hinduization of the aboriginals as the most important religious change in India, observing what the aboriginals were doing under their eyes. I have already quoted Lyall's view of it. In my boyhood I came to know of one such case of Hinduization and was very proud of it. The Khasis of Assam never showed any tendency to adopt Hindu beliefs or rites, and they were converted to Christianity in large numbers. But one Khasi of good education and social position became a Hindu and performed the worship of Durga in the orthodox Bengali manner. He even adopted a Bengali name, Jivan Ray. Historians of ancient India, too, have put forward the view that many of the Hindu dynasties of central India were of aboriginal origins. In fact, it is the builders of the famous temple group of Khajuraho who have been thought to be so.

Why some historians of Hinduism took the alternative view that the aboriginals influenced the incoming Aryans has its explanation. What is really surprising is that they should have put forward this opinion after reading Sanskrit. If the whole of Sanskrit literature, sacred or profane, makes one thing clear it is that there was one line no Hindu could cross, and that was the line

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which separated the Aryan in India from the non-Aryan. The two ethnic nouns even acquired moral connotations: to be *Arya* (Aryan) was to be noble and honourable, and to be *Anarya* (non-Aryan) was to be base and dishonourable. The non-Aryans were beyond the pale of Hindu society, and therefore untouchable. The Aryan Hindus regarded them with fear, hatred, contempt, disgust, but at times these feelings were mixed with some admiration for their physical strength, frankness, and joyousness. It is impossible even to imagine that with such pride of race as they always showed the Hindus would borrow anything from the non-Aryans to create their fully developed way of life. It is easier to believe that the Americans of the United States have created a new Christianity by borrowing ideas from the Red Indians, or that the Boers in South Africa have a religion which is a mixture of Christianity and the practices of the Zulus or Hottentots.

The historical ground for rejecting the theory of adoption from the aboriginals is that no scrap of evidence exists to prove the existence of any kind of developed religion among the aboriginals of India. There are references to their religious practices in Sanskrit books, but these show the religion of the aboriginals to have been very much what the British administrators observed it to be.

The theory of the adoption of features from the aboriginal religions by the Indo-European Hindus owes its origin and currency to wholly adventitious reasons, which are emotional predispositions and not intellectual conclusions. To begin with, those who took interest in the early form of Hinduism, that is, the Vedic religion, were German and very romantic. They totally refused to believe that a fellow-Aryan people could have practised human sacrifice, worshipped the phallus, or been given to magic and spells, and so they attributed all that they regarded as degrading in the practice of Hinduism to the non-Aryan aboriginals.

What was really surprising was that they even ignored the chthonic and sexual features in the *Rig-Veda* itself, and seemed to be unaware that all the Indo-European peoples had both human sacrifice and phallicism. With greater knowledge of the Greek, Roman, German, and Norse religions there is now not the slightest reason to derive any Hindu practice, however degrading it might seem to idealizers, from the aboriginals. Yet the myth of aboriginal influences still dogs the history of Hinduism.

The second contribution to the theory of an intermingling of

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Aryan and non-Aryan elements in Hinduism came from the missionaries. They found that the strongest resistance to conversion to Christianity was coming from the high-caste Hindus, more especially the learned priests who had their conservatism nourished by Sanskrit. Quite rightly they saw in that language the source of the ideological resistance to Christianity. Therefore they began to propagate the idea that some of the popular languages of India were not Indo-European but Dravidian or Turanian. One missionary even went to the length of saying that the Bengali language was more Turanian than Indo-European, which was of course absurd. In addition to them some British administrators, who became amateur anthropologists, put forward the theory that the Bengali people were not Aryan, but Dravido-Mongol.

The latest contribution to the myth was made by Bengali intellectuals in my young days, and that was due to a cultural conflict which had developed in Bengali society. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century the Bengali intelligentsia was divided between liberalism and conservatism. At first the liberal movement with its ideas of religious and social reform carried everything before it, and the traditional conservatives could not resist the liberals. But towards the end of the century a wholly new kind of Hindu conservatism appeared in Bengal. Basing their doctrines on the work of the European Orientalists, they gave a new interpretation to Hinduism, and justified polytheism, image worship, and all the practices of traditional Hinduism, rationalizing them with arguments taken from Comparative Philology and Comparative Religion. In this new Hindu movement, the notion of an Indo-European family of languages with its racial suggestion fortified the old Hindu pride of being Aryan. As a result, on the popular level an Aryan legend was created and believed in, which was as grotesque as the Aryan doctrine of the Nazis. This movement became dominant in Bengali life by 1905. To counteract this, the Bengali liberals trotted out a theory that the Bengalis were not Aryans at all, and as a corollary to it they also put forward the idea that a good deal of Hinduism was non-Aryan. As Bengali thinking very powerfully influenced all historical notions held by Anglicized Indians, the theory of an intermingling of Aryan and non-Aryan elements in Hinduism has become part of a progressive credo in India. Historically, it does not deserve any consideration.

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Role of the South

One very important aspect of the later development of Hinduism has finally to be noted. It is the part played in the process by south India from the ninth century onwards. From that time all the new speculation, exegesis, and movements originated virtually in the south. What had happened in the Gangetic plain to shift Hindu thinking to the south is not clear, but in any case religious life and thought seem to have become wholly static in it. On the other hand, the south created not only the philosophy of the Vedanta, but also a new religious feeling manifested both in Saivism and Vaishnavism. Another interesting aspect of the geographical shift is that in contrast with the north, where all the religious and philosophical texts had fictitious or eponymous authors, mostly the legendary sages, in the south these were composed by definite historical persons. The anonymity of Hinduism came to an end.

Naturally, this process was completed by the Muslim conquest, which destroyed the Hindu political and intellectual aristocracy in the north. Henceforth, in the south alongside of the Hindu political power, there also flourished the Hindu intellectual power. The task of maintaining Hinduism by exegesis was taken over by the scholars of the south, who might be likened to the Byzantine scholars who continued the study of Greek literature. The Vedas, the Upanishads, and all the major texts of Hinduism, including the *Gita*, found new commentators in the south, and it is the interpretations offered by these scholars which remain the most authoritative all over India. The only region in northern India where scholarly study of the Hindu philosophical and legal systems was continued was Bengal with the adjacent district of Mithila or the northern portion of Bihar.

Nevertheless, movement and innovation in religious life did not cease in the Gangetic plain. But it assumed a popular character which made Hinduism of the old Aryavarta (the land of the Aryans) very simple. The outcome of the process was the creation of a popular devotion and popular sects. Thus there was a reversal of the roles of the north and the south in respect of the historical development and continuity of Hinduism. Aryavarta, the old centre, lost its lead, and transferred that to its colonial extension. The north became simple, and crude in its simplicity, but both the

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south and Bengal remained sophisticated, but tending towards fossilization.

In concluding this attempt at giving an indication of the historical development of Hinduism, I would repeat that the account given in this part of the book stops at the Muslim conquest of India at the end of the twelfth century. Hinduism continued to grow and change, and the process is still going on. But at the point chosen for concluding the historical survey, the structure of Hindu religious life was fully erected, and the later changes only extended it without in any way modifying the character of the system.

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PART TWO

DESCRIPTIVE

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Chapter One

SOURCES FOR DESCRIPTION

TO give a description of Hinduism is not as difficult as to reconstruct its history. But this, too, has its problem, which is to make the account what it ought to be. First and foremost, the description must correspond to a reality and not be merely an epitome of the immense amount of information on mythology, doctrines, and rituals contained in the texts. After that it must show Hinduism not only in its fully developed state, but also at its most typical.

The most obvious way of fulfilling both the conditions would be to show the religion as it is today, if not in all its variations, at least in its major features which are common to the whole of India. But this description will not be that of its unimpaired expression. During the last fifty years or so the religion has been subjected to so many disruptive influences, partly from the cultural impact of the West and partly from economic changes, that many of its observances have disappeared and the devotion it inspired and evoked has become very much weakened.

This is particularly true of the educated, upper-class Hindus who live in the great cities and constitute the cultural élite. The hold of Hinduism on them is somewhat like that of Christianity on the Western urban intelligentsia, though almost all of them remain more or less superstitious. In the villages, among rural folks, the religion is still living and strong, but very simple. Besides, even in that world so many cultural, economic, and demographic changes are taking place that Hindu outlooks and practices are undergoing a sort of erosion. Thus any description of Hinduism based on observation of the contemporary state of Hinduism would give an incomplete and faded picture. Above all, the fervour and joy of Hindu religious life will be seen in a much weakened form.

Logically, the alternative would be to describe Hinduism as it was before the Muslim conquest at the end of the twelfth century, when the Hindus were politically independent and their culture had reached its full development. But even for the period of four

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centuries from the eighth, which was not included in the historical part of this book, the sources are so scanty that it is not possible to give a reasonably complete and systematic account of the actual religious life of the Hindus. The same inadequacy faces the student for the six centuries of Muslim rule. We have some knowledge of the new popular religious movements and of the preachings of the popular prophets, but virtually none about the higher levels of religious life.

So one has to face the paradoxical situation that in order to give a more or less systematic description of Hinduism one has to come down to the age when European observers began to write about the religion. Their accounts not only show which of the beliefs and rituals laid down in the texts were to be found in actual practice, but also supply information which cannot be found in them. But as the writings on Hinduism by foreign writers who observed it at first hand did not become large enough in volume till the nineteenth century, a systematic description of the religion based on them would only show what it was like in that century.

European Accounts

However, Europeans began to write about Hinduism long before that date. Actually, the earliest books by them date from the seventeenth century. Three early accounts deserve particular attention, and the earliest of them is the first extant account of Hinduism by a European writer. Naturally, these writers were all Christian priests or missionaries, who could be expected to take an interest in Indian religious life and also to be the most competent Europeans to write on it.

The first book was by an English clergyman, and was published in London in 1630. His name was Henry Lord, and he was attached to the English commercial establishment at Surat on the western coast of India. The Gujarati Hindus of this region belonged mostly to the Bania or trading caste, and therefore Lord gave to his book the title: *A Discoverie of the Sects of the Banians*, and further explained its scope by adding: 'Containing their History, Law, Liturgie, Casts, Customs, and Ceremonies—Gathered from their Bramanes, Teachers of that Sect: As the particulars were comprized in the Books of their Law, called Shaster: Together with a display of their Manners, both in times past, and their present.'

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Though the book was not as exhaustive as this description suggested, it covered, despite its restricted title of *Banian Religion*, the whole range of Hindu beliefs and mythologies so far as Lord knew them, and he regarded himself as a discoverer in this field. He was very much struck by the appearance of the Gujarati Hindus who worked for the East India Company or transacted business with it, and he wrote:

> A people presented themselves to mine eyes, cloathed in linen garments somewhat low descending, of a gesture and garbe, as I may say, maydenly and wellnigh effiminate; of a countenance shy and somewhat estranged, yet smiling out a glosed[1] and bashful familiarity . . .

He continued:

> Truth to say, mine eyes, unacquainted with such objects, tooke up their wonder and gazed; and this admiration, the badge of a fresh travailer, bred in mee the importunity of a questioner. I asked what manner of people these were, so strangely notable and notably strange? Reply was made. They were Banians, a people forraigne to the knowledge of the Christian world; their religion, rites and customs sparingly treated of by any, and they no less reserved in the publication of them: but some opinion they derived from the philosopher Pythagoras, touching transanimation of soules. It was thought the novelty would make the discovery thereof grateful and acceptable to some of our countrymen: that some of my predecessors had become scrutinous to bring to light this religion; but whether deterred with fictions chymeraes, wherewith Banian writings abound, that might make it unworthy of acceptation, or the shyness of the Bramanes, who will scarce admit a stranger to conversation, the worke was left to him that would make a path through these impediments.

Lord said that Thomas Kerridge, President of the factory, urged him to make up the omission, and that he was compiling his book from the manuscripts of the Hindus with the help of interpreters, especially 'out of booke of theirs called the *Shaster*, which to them is their bible, containing the grounds of their religion in a written word'.

The second description was written by a Dutch priest and missionary who lived for many years on the coast of Coromandel and adjacent regions. His name was Abraham Roger, and his

[1] Variant of *gloze* = to shine or gleam *(O.E.D.)*.

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book in Dutch was published at Amsterdam in 1651. A German translation followed in 1663, and a French with copious notes in 1670. The general title of the book as given in French is: *La Porte ouverte, pour parvenir à la connoissance du paganism caché ou la vraye représentation de la vie, des mœurs de la religion, & du service divin des Brahmines, qui demeurent sur les costes de Choromandel, & aux pays circonvoisins*. The annotator was Sieur Thomas la Grue, Maistre és Arts et Docteur en Medecine. This book is much fuller and more accurate than that of Lord, and in compiling it Roger was helped by a Brahmin named Padmanabha. The book also contains a translation of one hundred aphorisms of Bhartrihari, and is illustrated by many line-engravings showing the burning of a Hindu widow, incarnations of Vishnu, and also what must be regarded as the first representation of the story of Hindus throwing themselves under the car of Juggernaut.

The third description also comes from a Dutchman, Philip Baldaeus, 'Minister of the Word of God in Ceylon'. It formed the last part of his lengthy account of the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel as well as Ceylon, and was published in Amsterdam in 1672. An English translation was published in Amsterdam in 1704, and it was reproduced in the third volume of *Churchill's Collection of Voyages and Travels*, brought out in 1745. The description of Hinduism was stated to be 'a most circumstantial and compleat Account of the Idolatry of the Pagans in the *East Indies*, the *Malabars, Benjans, Gentives, Brahmans*, etc. Taken partly from their own *Vedam*, or Law-Book, and authentick Manuscripts; partly from frequent Conversation with their Priests and Divines: With draughts of their Idols, done after their Originals.' The engravings made specially for this collection are extremely fine and accurate, and therefore a valuable supplement to the description.

The lay interest in Hinduism naturally began to show itself with the establishment of British power in India, and as it happened the earliest lay account came from the man who was also the author of the sensational account of the Black Hole. He was John Zephaniah Holwell. Holwell boasted about his knowledge of the religion of the Hindus, of his efforts to collect information, and of his manuscripts. But his account is both crude and full of mistakes.

More competent laymen began to follow him. Their interest in Hinduism was the result of administrative necessity. British rule was extending over large parts of India, and in order to govern

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the country the British administrators had to acquire knowledge of the laws, customs, and social institutions of the inhabitants, both Muslim and Hindu. This also meant knowledge of the two religions because among both Hindus and Muslims, and more especially among the first, all secular matters were connected with religion. For this reason Warren Hastings, with all his heavy political duties, took a good deal of interest in the promotion of Oriental learning. Thus he wrote a long letter of recommendation to the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in favour of an English translation of the *Gita* by Charles Wilkins, a servant of the Company—which was also the first authentic translation of a Sanskrit religious text into any European language.[1] In this letter he said that he, as Governor-General of India, encouraged Oriental studies among the servants of the Company for three reasons:

I. He believed that the permanency of the Company's dominion in India depended more on the virtue than the ability of its servants and that cultivation of language and science will form the moral character and habits of the service.

II. 'Every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity: in the specific instance which I have stated, it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; it imprints on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence.'

III. Last of all, knowledge of Hindu culture was likely to bring a change in the attitude of the British people to Indians. As Hastings put it:

> It is not very long since the inhabitants of India were considered by many, as creatures scarce above the degree of savage life; nor, I fear, is that prejudice yet wholly eradicated, though surely abated. Every instance which brings their real character home to observation will impress us with a more generous sense of feeling for their

[1] '*The Bhagavat-Geeta*, or a Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon; in eighteen lectures, with Notes. Translated from the original in the *Sanskreet*, or ancient language of the *Brahmans*, by Charles Wilkins, Senior Merchant in the service of the Honourable the East India Company, on their Bengal Establishment.' (London, 1785.)

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natural rights, and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own, but such instances can only be obtained in their writings: and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which it once yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance.[1]

Administrative necessity also gave rise to a genuine scientific interest in Hinduism and this in its turn created the scholarly competence which was needed to deal with it. The foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 marks the beginning of serious studies. Thus from the last years of the eighteenth century a series of essays and books on Hinduism began to be written both from direct observation and study of the texts. H. T. Colebrooke, a civil servant of the East India Company, was the first man to provide a reliable account of Vedic literature, and he also described current aspects of Hinduism.

The second official who contributed to the knowledge of Hinduism was Horace Hayman Wilson, who went to India as a surgeon, became the Master of the Calcutta Mint, and made himself the leading English Sanskrit scholar of the age. Afterwards he became Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, which was the first professorship of the language to be established in England. He wrote about Hinduism as a scholar, and his essays provided some of the earliest and most reliable accounts of Hinduism as practised. Gradually the religious interest among the administrators widened into the ethnographic and sociological as well. But, as has been said, Hindu social life being inseparable from religion, the sociological works of the officials also remain indispensable for a study of Hinduism.

On their part, the missionaries continued to write about Hinduism. Their interest was natural, because they could not preach Christianity in India without some knowledge of the religion of those whom they wanted to convert, and also without acquiring the ability to read and speak the languages of the Hindus. In fact, the Boden Professorship of Sanskrit at Oxford was endowed to serve the cause of conversion. Colonel Boden of the East India Company's service gave £25,000 for this purpose, 'being of opinion that a more general and critical knowledge of the Sanskrit language will be the means of enabling his countrymen to proceed

[1] C. Wilkins, *The Bhagavat-Geeta*, pp. 12–13.

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in the conversion of the Natives of India to the Christian Religion, by disseminating a knowledge of the sacred scriptures amongst them, more effectually than all other means whatever'. In India, even in later times when the Hindus were asked to read the Bible, they asked the missionaries to read the Hindu sacred books first.

Apart from serious works on Hinduism from both administrators and missionaries there were also a fair number of books on it to cater for the popular interest in the religion in the West, which was ready to fasten on all that was curious, sensational, or charlatanesque in the religion. These books do not deserve serious consideration. Unfortunately, however, it was such accounts rather than the scholarly works which moulded the popular idea of Hinduism in the West. The stories of the car of Juggernaut, the Suttee, the bloody sacrifices, the lechery of Krishna and of his worshippers, etc., travelled far, even to the United States. So, when in 1858 a Bengali Brahmin who had adopted Christianity went to Boston to learn about Unitarian Christianity, he was told about Suttee, hook-swinging, and Juggernaut, and was also asked: 'Do the Hindu mothers throw their babies into the Ganges now?' This man, whose name was Joguth Chunder Gangooly (properly transliterated Jagat Chandra Ganguli) and who wrote a book on Hinduism, commented: 'I am quite amused to see the little school boys and girls in America, who seem to know more about Hinduism than I do.' However, if such accounts have not done any good to Hinduism they have also not done much harm.

Value of Missionary Writing

As the books on Hinduism written by the missionaries constitute the most exhaustive source of the religion as practised it is necessary to appraise them correctly. Throughout the nineteenth century two trends were seen side by side in their writings, one polemical and the other objective. Some of the polemical books or pamphlets were ferociously denunciatory. But even the denunciation has considerable historical value, because if the missionaries had to fight Hinduism they could not afford to be inaccurate as to facts, whatever might be their interpretation. They often gave information about certain repulsive facts about the religion which were an integral part of it, but which those who wished to show it in a favourable light avoided with a timid discretion which

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amounted to suppression of truth. The denunciation is also historically important because it provoked the modern Hindu apologia, and in spite of being contested publicly gave a direction to the efforts at reform.

But the great majority of the missionary writers did not feel called upon to pronounce judgements, and thought that it was in their interest to see Hinduism as it was and when writing about it to provide correct information. Besides, the missionaries who wrote scholarly works felt that to describe Hinduism accurately was the best means of controverting it by implication, and even of discrediting it. It is curious to note how this attitude was foreshadowed even by Lord, whose book was published in 1630. In his final conclusion he did indeed include a paragraph of 'censure on the material parts of this relation', but substantially his was a detached attitude based on his confidence in Christianity. As he wrote:

> Thus, worthy reader, thou hast the summe of the Banian religion, such as it is; not voyd of vaine superstitions, and composed forgery, as well may be judged by the precedent discourse, wherein, as in all other heresies, may be gathered how Sathan leadeth those that are out of the pale of the church, a round, in the maze of errour and gentilisme. I might leave the particulars to thy censure, as well to thy reading.

He thought that his book might settle his readers in the solidness of their faith which was purged of such levities. But he appears to have felt sorry for the Banians so misled by their priests, for on the title-page of his book he quoted Isaiah 9:16: 'The leaders of this people cause *them* to err; and *they that are* led of them *are* destroyed.' At the same time he hoped that the 'novelty of this relation may make it gratefull to any, who like an *Athenian* desireth to hear something strange or new.' The point of view of the modern missionaries was set down very clearly by W. J. Wilkins of the London Missionary Society, who in 1887 published a very accurate description of Hinduism as seen in northern India in his time.[1] He wrote in its introduction:

> In this book, as in my former one, I have abstained from comment on the character of these practices; my work here is rather that of

[1] Wilkins, W. J., *Modern Hinduism* (1887). The previous work to which he refers is *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (1882).

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a chronicler than of a preacher. In writing of the mythology of the Hindus I felt that the most powerful refutation of Hinduism was a fair statement of what their books themselves teach concerning the character and conduct of the beings whom they worship as divine; and in describing the everyday life of the Hindus, which is the practical outcome of such worship, there seems to me to be but little necessity for comment.

It must not be forgotten, however, that this very objectivity of the missionaries in writing about Hinduism has been condemned by modern Hindus as propaganda against Hinduism. These Hindus are profoundly suspicious of all books on Hinduism written even by Western academic scholars. Any description or interpretation which does not conform to the recently formulated Hindu apologia, which is more political than religious, will be condemned as misrepresentation or even denigration of the religion. And all the modern Western apologists of Hinduism will be produced as witnesses against those who try to write objectively.

The realistic approach, which has been generally that of the missionaries when they have given formal accounts of Hinduism, is even more suspect. For example, the Abbé Dubois' famous *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies* (published in 1817 in English from the first French draft, and more fully in 1897 from the final French manuscript), has always been regarded by the Hindus as missionary propaganda against Hinduism. Yet the book is very valuable for the immense amount of information it gives about the state of Hindu society and religion in south India at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. There is no book like it for any other part of India.

The only point which can be made against this book and also later works on Hinduism by the missionaries is that they all ignore the higher religious sentiment and thought which can be found in the doctrinal texts, especially the Upanishads, expositions of which have been given by academic scholars. But the missionaries were concerned with a different world of religion altogether, and in that world even the Hindus who practised their religion devoutly, completely ignored the rarefied region. For what might be regarded as the workaday world of Hinduism, the missionary works supply information which no student can do without. Moreover, any mistakes or misrepresentations that there might be in their writings can always be corrected by anyone who has

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personal knowledge of Hinduism as practised. But the charge of misrepresentation is mostly on the score of attitudes.

Complementary Hindu Writing

The information supplied by the missionaries and administrators can be supplemented from what the Hindus have written about their religion themselves. But their formal presentation is either polemical or apologetic. Before the nineteenth century the Hindus took their religion for granted, they lived in it like fish in water, and so they felt no need to have it preached to themselves. But, when in that century the impact of Western ideas either created an external threat for it or fostered doubts about it in their own minds, explanatory or justificatory writing naturally made its appearance. The first Hindu to produce this kind of apology was the reformer Ram Mohun Roy (? 1772–1833), who on the one hand preached Hindu monotheism on the basis of the Upanishads and, on the other, carried on controversies with the Christian clergy in India. But the re-examination of Hinduism begun by him did not gain force till the end of the century, when a full-blown apology was produced as part of a movement which might be called the Hindu Counter-Reformation and which was a reply to the Brahmo movement, the Hindu Protestantism.

The amount of factual information given about Hinduism in the writings of these reformers was not large, and does not exceed what is given by the European writers. Nor is the information always accurate or precise. In regard to interpretation they read into Hinduism many things which were not in it, and could never be. At its popular level these neo-Hindu apologetics were extremely crude and childish. But at the highest level they were both plausible and competent. What they attempted to do was to make Hinduism consistent with the European thought of the age, especially with the conclusions of comparative religion and even anthropology. The general tendency of this school of exposition was to rationalize the religion, which in itself might be regarded as its de-Hinduization. Therefore, the whole of the apologetic writing by modern Hindus is better utilized to give an account of the reforming movments than to describe the religion as it actually was.

However, this does not mean that the student is left wholly

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without information from other Hindu sources. For one thing, it can be seen that certain Hindu texts are being fully used in current practice. Therefore these can be drawn upon to describe the rituals as they are actually performed. In addition, secular literature in modern Indian languages contains descriptions of worship and experiences which have no apologetic intention. This is particularly true of Bengali literature. Books in verse and prose, written both before and after the establishment of British rule, can supply vivid and realistic details of religious life. Even incidental references to Hinduism are extremely valuable. There are also books which describe traditional Bengali life, in which religion is an ever-present element. Though at times the descriptions are idealized, there is no illegitimate idealization.

Personal Observation and Enquiry

A supplementary source would be personal enquiry. But in seeking information from Hindus a foreign student has to be very wary. In the first place, the Hindus have always been very unwilling to give information about their religion. They have regarded it as the heritage and privilege of those who were born in it. As early as the early eleventh century, Alberuni, whose description of India has been referred to before, wrote: 'They [the Hindus] are by nature niggardly in communicating what they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still more, of course, from any foreigner.'

All the early writers on Hinduism, beginning with Lord, also noticed this reserve, as has been seen in the extracts quoted from them. But the most striking reference to it is to be found in Dubois' preface to his book, in which he describes the attitude of the Brahmins from whom all his information about the religion had to be obtained.

> All persons who have visited India or who have any notion of the character of the Brahmins, of the high esteem in which they hold themselves, and of the distant *hauteur* with which they treat the common people, will be able to appreciate the difficulties which anybody must encounter who would become intimate, or even acquainted, with these proud personages. The hate and contempt which they cherish against all strangers, and especially against

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Europeans; the jealous inquietude with which they hide from the profane the mysteries of their religious cult; the records of their learning; the privacy of their homes: all these form barriers between themselves and their observers which it is almost impossible to pass.

However Dubois added: 'Nevertheless, by much diplomacy and perseverance I have succeeded in surmounting most of the obstacles which have turned back many others before me.' He also described his method. 'I made it my constant rule,' he wrote, 'to live as they did. I adopted their style of clothing, and I studied their customs and methods of life in order to be exactly like them. I even went so far as to avoid any display of repugnance to the majority of their peculiar prejudices. By such circumspect conduct I was able to ensure a free and hearty welcome from people of all castes and conditions, and was often favoured of their own accord with the most curious and interesting particulars about themselves.' Above all, it must not be forgotten that he wrote his book after living more than twenty years in India in this fashion.

The difficulties in the way of gaining reliable information about their religion from the Hindus, especially from highly educated Hindus, are not less today than they were in Dubois' time, though they are of a different kind. Unless they are very traditional and orthodox, present-day Hindus will be more communicative than secretive, but those who will be ready to give information will generally mislead foreigners both consciously and unconsciously. Most of them are thoroughgoing chauvinists and are interested in propagating a particular version of Hinduism agreeing with the Western myth about it. They are also ignorant and unfamiliar with the original sources. To spread these ideas about Hinduism has even become a commercially profitable activity. Moreover, those Europeans who will be ready nowadays to live in India like Dubois will have become such converts to Hindu charlatanry in advance that they will only be confirmed in their conversion. Some of the information which research workers collect in their field-work in India seems to me, when it is derived from statements made in answer to questions, to have been given with the intention of leg-pulling.

Nationalistic Hindus even suspect fellow-Hindus whom they look upon as unorthodox. A university lecturer in Calcutta refused to give me information about the routine of worship in the famous

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Kali temple at Kalighat unless I gave him an undertaking not to show irreverence to Hinduism. He even paid me a left-handed compliment by saying that he was demanding this because a clever writer like me could hold anything up to ridicule.

But it has also to be added that in the past the reluctance was due to a sincerely felt doubt. A highly competent missionary, Mrs Sinclair Stevenson, who has written an exhaustive and accurate account of the rites of the twice-born, based on her investigations in Gujarat, has quoted in her book[1] what a pundit said to her when supplying her with information.

> 'Mem Sahib', he remarked, 'these are our sacred things that we are telling you, and we are willing to tell you personally of them, but will the people who read the books also study them with reverence?'

This kind of scruple may still survive.

But there still remains another resource—personal observation of the rites, devotions, and festivals without seeking explanations from the participants. Naturally, it will not be easy for a foreigner to get opportunities to observe, and in any case he will have difficulty in interpreting what he is seeing by himself. But a Hindu can observe his religion in this way both in the cities and in the rural areas. Certainly, even in the villages what is found today are attenuated survivals, but they are also authentic features, so far as they survive. What they show is a structure which is damaged but not wholly in ruins.

If, however, a person has been able to see Hinduism as practised before 1920, when the unsettling effect of the recent social changes was not fully in evidence and, even better, if he has seen it in the first decade of this century as I have done, he will be on firmer ground. Thus, comparing my personal knowledge of the practices of Hinduism with what I have read in the best European writers, I have found that the two generally agreed. Furthermore, with the help of my experience I have been able to bring to life what I have found in these books as well as in the texts which are still used for worship.

All these sources taken together and utilized with discrimination, will enable a writer to present a picture of Hinduism which

[1] Mrs Sinclair Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-born*. This book is in the series, 'Religious Quest of India', edited by J. N. Farquhar and H. D. Griswold.

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will be reasonably full as well as dependable. That is what is being attempted in the description which follows. Formally it will, of course, be an account of Hinduism as it was in the nineteenth century. There is no reason, however, to think that in the preceding centuries Hinduism was different. To make my description correspond more closely to the traditional form I have excluded from it all the features which the reforming movements brought into the religion under the influence of Western ideas. This involves no sacrifice of accuracy, for the new movements were like man-made canals taken out from a broad natural river and though connected with it they ran in a parallel and far less broad course.

But the question still remains whether Hinduism as it was in the nineteenth century, the only age in its history which provides sufficient material for a more or less full description, was the religion at its best. By that time, as is generally accepted, Hinduism had been in existence for nearly three thousand years, and was certainly the oldest among the living religions of the day. So it can be asked whether at the end of that long history it had not passed its prime and was in decay, or at best was in a static, devitalized condition.

Decadence and Corruption

Some European observers of Hinduism in the nineteenth century, and following them the Hindu reformers of the age, definitely took that view. The Europeans were even discussing, as many of them are also doing today, whether it was not actually dying. Friedrich Max Müller, the most influential, sympathetic, and at the same time the most level-headed and scholarly expounder of the religion and civilization of the Hindus in the latter half of that century, suggested the possibility. Speaking on the Christian missions in Westminster Abbey in 1873 he declared that in spite of the fact that Hinduism was still professed by at least 110 million souls (a census figure which he thought might be far short of the real number) he did not shrink from saying that their religion was dying or dead because it belonged to a stratum of thought which was long buried beneath the feet of modern man.

The worship of Siva, Vishnu, and other popular deities, he continued, was of the same and in many cases of a more degraded

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and savage character than the worship of Jupiter, Apollo or Minerva. 'A religion', he said, 'may linger on for a long time, it may be accepted by large masses of the people, because it is there, and there is nothing better. But when a religion has ceased to produce defenders of the faith, prophets, champions, martyrs, it has ceased to live, in the true sense of the word; and in that sense the old orthodox Brahmanism has ceased to live for more than a thousand years.'

Sir Monier Monier-Williams, who held the Boden Professorship of Sanskrit at Oxford from 1860 to 1899, and who had a very wide knowledge of the Hinduism of his day, was even more emphatic. In his book *Hinduism*, first published in 1877, he wrote: 'The ancient fortress of Hinduism, with its four sides, Monotheism, Pantheism, Dualism, and Polytheism, is everywhere tottering and ready to fall.'

Both Max Müller and Monier-Williams raised the question of the future. The former observed: 'How long this living death of a national religion in India may last, no one can tell: for our purposes, however, for gaining an idea of the issue of the great religious struggle of the future, that religion too is dead and gone.' According to Müller, the only three religions which were living and 'between which the decisive battle for the dominion of the world will have to be fought', were Buddhism, Muhammadanism, and Christianity.

Monier-Williams wrote: 'What then is to become of the masses of the people when their ancient faith sinks from beneath their feet? Only two other homes are before them—a cold theism and a heart-stirring Christianity. They are both already established in the soil of India. But Christianity is spreading its boundaries more widely, and strikings its foundations more deeply. It appeals directly to the heart. It is exactly suited to the need of the masses of the people of India. Christianity is their true home.'

The idea that Hinduism was in decay was accompanied by another notion which had a greater moral and spiritual force behind it. According to it, Hinduism as seen contemporaneously was a corrupt form of the religion, which in some undetermined past was a very pure religion. This notion was first formulated by the Western Orientalists, who lived in a religious age and could not keep out qualitative judgements from their scientific study of Hinduism, and it was a deduction from their knowledge of the

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early religious texts of the Hindus, e.g. the Vedas, the Upanishads, and certain other works.

For instance, in 1869, Max Müller wrote to the Duke of Argyll, who was then the Secretary of State for India: 'It is certainly true that the religion of the Hindus, as far as we can gather it from their sacred hymns in the Veda, is free from everything that strikes us as degrading in the present state of their religion and morality in India.' He thought that between the ancient religion of India and religious worship of the Hindus of his times there had been several falls and several rises. Traditional Hindus were not, however, conscious of any corruption. But the reformers, as has been pointed out, took over this historical view.[1]

The Real State

All these connected ideas of decadence, corruption, and restoration of the original pure form of Hinduism really beg the question. It has been shown in a previous chapter that all the historical evidence that we have shows Hinduism to have been in the classical age of Hindu civilization almost what it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In any case Max Müller's contention that in his time Hinduism was dying or already dead did not pass unchallenged. The objector was Sir Alfred Lyall, one of the most distinguished English civil servants in India, as well as a scholar and acute observer of Indian life at first hand. In an article published in the July 1874 issue of the *Fortnightly Review*, then edited by John Morley, he said that it was worthwhile to enlarge on what he described as the very premature interment of Hinduism. He wrote:

> What I want to say is, that to an eye-witness this religion is not dead, nor dying, nor even dangerously ill; and, moreover, that so far from being a non-missionary religion in the sense of a religion that makes no proselytes, one might safely aver that more persons in India become every year Brahmanists than all the converts to all the other religions in India put together.

He pointed out that Brahmanism was kept expanding by the

[1] The Hindu reformer Ram Mohun Roy put forward this view at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it became popular in India only in the last quarter of the century.

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gradual but steady absorption of the primitive peoples of the backward regions into it. He explained that 'Brahmanism is all over India a necessary first stage for the outlying tribes towards Indian civilization, or admission to the citizenship of the great Hindu community.' Internally, according to Lyall, Brahmanism was kept growing by the 'working of the devotees and spiritual leaders who found new sects and set up new lights in divine matters.' He summed up the position in a clear-cut statement on the state of the religion. He also gave the reasons for its being in that state:

Brahmanism still lives and is propagated in India faster than any other religion, for these three principal reasons, namely—

> That it is indigenous, the produce of the soil and of an environment that still exists.
>
> That it is a social system, and a very elastic one; while the people of India as a body still need a religion which, like Brahmanism, provides them with social rules, with laws of custom as well as of conduct.
>
> That it encourages and is nourished by a constant miraculous agency working at full pressure, by relays of divine embodiments; while in the present intellectual state of the population in India no religion will be widely embraced without miraculous credentials.

Lyall anticipated that these three characteristics were likely to keep Brahmanism alive for several generations to come. His article was published with a lengthy comment by Max Müller who felt most anxious that it should be published in England as the work of a man who saw with his own eyes and thought with his own brain, though it was directed against himself.

Lyall was wholly right in regarding Hinduism as a living religion in his time and in writing: 'There is nothing in the structure or present state of Brahmanism which need bring final dissolution upon this religion more rapidly than upon others, or that need prevent its undergoing the same modifications, mystifications, and spiritual quickening which have preserved other Asiatic religions.' This was truer of Hinduism at the beginning of the nineteenth century than towards its end when Lyall saw it, for at that time it had not felt the impact of European culture at all. All the evidence we have of the structure and functioning of Hinduism at the end of the eighteenth century or beginning of the nineteenth shows it to be a living phenomenon.

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The concept of Hinduism as a stagnant lagoon of religious beliefs and practices in which the Hindus live like its fauna is, of course, an extension of the old and widespread idea of an unchanging East. It is responsible for many unrealistic anticipations regarding the future of Hinduism even now. It has led European observers wholly to exaggerate the importance of any changes they have noticed in the religious life of the Hindus, due either to ideological or economic influences, and to forecast a collapse of Hinduism. In the nineteenth century such a dissolution was expected from the cultural impact of the West, today it is predicted from industrialization. The same kind of uncritical thinking is seen in contemporary European writing on the caste system and the joint family. Of Hinduism it has to be said that the more it changes the more it remains the same thing. So, it creates the impression of staticity, and perhaps even of stagnancy.

But there is living and living. A state of becoming and a state of being are both living states. Besides, nothing can remain in a state of being without perpetual renovation, whose extent and tempo may vary according to circumstances. It is impossible to establish historically when Hinduism was in a state of becoming as distinct from being. But even in its state of being about which we have historical evidence over something like fifteen hundred years, it has been a living current like the great rivers of the northern plains. For instance, we do not know when the Ganges came into existence as a river, but we know that it has changed its course, and when one channel has been silted up it has flowed through other channels.

The living quality of Hinduism is demonstrated by the loyalty it has commanded from its followers. The faith which the Hindus had in their religion never wavered even in its worst days. It has had waxings and wanings which have kept the balance even. Though the religion was inherited and imposed by custom, faith in it was not passive, but always fervent. There was even fanaticism behind it. Within Hindu society any positive disregard of the Hindu way of life was suppressed inexorably by means of social coercion of the most inhuman type. The Hindus, too, had their Inquisition, but it was administered by a whole society. Against attacks, fancied or real, from the outside there was revolt. Privately, many may not have believed what they accepted publicly, but the volume of such disbelief was far less in the Hindu

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order than disbelief in Christianity among Europeans in the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century. The staunchness of the collective faith of the Hindus made private or individual irreligiosity of no significance, because what Hinduism enforced was public obedience. It took no account of private opinion.

The Question of Vitality

A religious system which has shown such aggressiveness and which can command such submission can never be regarded as devitalized. So, in writing about Hinduism in recent times the idea of decadence and corruption had better be given up altogether. Besides, it is very difficult to find out what is not decay in a religion by the standards adopted in the West for judging the quality of religious life. By that sort of standard the decay of Hinduism could be dated back almost to the Vedic age. Therefore, those who have played for safety in writing about Hinduism have almost reduced it to an airy nothing, serving out abstractions which baffle understanding. Unfortunately, in the West, Hinduism has attracted minds which rise to an ineffable ecstasy by feeding on emptiness or merely on words.

Lastly, in judging the vitality of Hinduism the point should be emphasized that it has maintained itself through the ages and enforced obedience to itself without support from any kind of organization, secular or spiritual. It has created an overall conformity by its own psychological hold, and this shows that there can be a kind of authority over men which is in no way less coercive than that of the State, though it is intangible. This coercive power of Hinduism was so absolute even in the nineteenth century that any idea of disregarding its injunctions even in such matters as wearing clothes or cutting the hair would have evoked horror as well as terror. Hinduism has shown that anarchy can be as authoritarian as any totalitarian state.

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Chapter Two

REGIONAL AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

TO offer a systematic description of Hinduism without bringing into relief its immense diversities at the same time, would be to mislead the reader. But to emphasize them, which is unavoidable, would be to give the impression that there is no system at all. The diversities in Hinduism are of many kinds. They may, however, be grouped under three broad categories. There are the variations in beliefs, cults, and rituals which make Hinduism appear like a conglomeration of religions. After that there are differences which are due to geographical distribution. Last of all, the attitudes and practices vary according to class affiliations. In this chapter I shall consider the last two kinds of variations, that is to say, those connected with the environment. The intrinsic differences will be dealt with in the next.

No European writer who has described Hinduism at first hand has been so careless as to do so without indicating the region to which his account applies. This was done by the earliest writers, Lord, Roger, and Baldaeus. The Abbé Dubois made it clear that his description was confined virtually to what he saw in south India. 'There is no place in India,' he wrote, 'which does not possess certain customs and practices of its own, and it would be impossible to give descriptions of them all.' Moreover, even in respect of south India he gave the caution that too general a meaning should not be given to what he was saying. He pointed out that there were such differences between the linguistic groups in south India itself that 'careful observers would see less resemblance between a Tamil and a Canarese, between a Telugu and a Mahratta, than between a Frenchman and an Englishman, an Italian and a German.'

Seventy years later W. J. Wilkins of the London Missionary Society had to make it clear that he was giving 'an account of religion and life of the Hindus in northern India.' He pointed out the risk any writer on Hinduism ran when describing it from his own knowledge:

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> It should be remembered also that descriptions absolutely true of certain classes or certain districts may not be strictly correct of other classes or other districts; and also that some classes are grossly ignorant of the customs of other classes, and the residents of one district, while familiar with the practices common there, are totally ignorant of what prevails in other parts of the country.

Therefore Wilkins thought it necessary to warn readers about too ready and impulsive a disbelief in statements made about the religion. 'When, therefore,' he wrote, 'hearing or reading of certain things being believed or done by Hindus, we are inclined to deny the accuracy of these statements, it is well to inquire whether it is not our limited knowledge that is at fault rather than the accuracy of the writer or speaker.'

I give one example to show how a Hindu showed this impulsive disbelief. This man was the Bengali Christian to whose book I referred in the previous chapter.[1] In it he vehemently denied that small children were ever thrown by their mothers into the mouth of the Ganges in Bengal in fulfilment of certain vows. He even added an appendix to his book to contradict the report, and in it he wrote:

> Ever since my arrival in America I have heard with great surprise the statement, received on the authority of missionaries, that the Hindoo mothers throw their infants into the river Ganges. Almost every man, woman, boy, or girl in the United States knows it, and has seen illustrations of it in various books. During my tour over some sixteen States and the Canadas, I noticed that the Hindoo mother, her baby, and the alligator, were the subjects of constant inquiry. The story of the infants being thrown into the Ganges by their heartless mistaken mothers, is believed by the people of this country to be either a custom or a religious institution of the Hindoos.

He declared that he could not 'suffer a groundless and strange story to run so freely through the Christian community, and bring upon the poor innocent women of India such undeserved reproach', and he asserted that he had not heard of it even as a grandmother's story. He wrote: 'I will confess that, although a Brahmin, a native of India, I never saw a child thrown alive into the Ganges, nor heard of such stories until I came to America.'

[1] See p. 109.

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In saying this he was not consciously untruthful, but he was amazingly ignorant. The man was born and brought up near Calcutta, on the very river at whose mouth the children were thrown into water. Besides, everybody (including myself as a child) knew it as fact. And what is absolutely decisive, the practice was prohibited by a legislative order of the Governor-General (Regulation VI of 1802), which made the throwing of children into the Ganges equivalent to murder.

So, when describing Hinduism with every intention to be truthful and making every effort to be accurate, a writer should never ignore the possibility that he might not be believed by some of his readers. On the other hand, it is also very difficult to detect a deliberately false statement. So the writer should clearly state what he is describing, and anyone who is too ready to disbelieve should check his own knowledge of the custom or practice described.[1]

Regional Types

It is easy to define the broad regional types and to account for their emergence as distinct forms. These are seen in a number of distinct blocs of beliefs and practices, each in a region which shows not only a physiographical unity, but also homogeneity in social and cultural life. These regions are the following: the great north Indian plain from the Punjab to Bihar, including the western portion of central India formerly known as Malwa: south India where the four civilized Dravidian languages are spoken; Bengal and Assam, including Orissa; Rajputana; the sub-Himalayan regions. There are two more recognizable blocs, the Maharashtra country and Gujarat, that is to say, the whole area of the British Indian province of Bombay; but the Hinduism of the Maharashtra country is akin to that of the south, and that of Gujarat to that in the Gangetic plain. There are, of course, variations within some of these regions. But all the other differences are pushed into a secondary place by the very large contrast between two types, namely, that which exists between the Hinduism

[1] Even when writing this book I myself contradicted a modern Tamil young woman, who I thought knew nothing about Hinduism, when she said that the god Kartikeya had a wife. On checking up I found that in south India the god was given a wife, whereas in Bengal he was regarded as a confirmed bachelor.

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of the northern plain on the one hand, and on the other of all the other regional blocs mentioned above.

The original and natural cause of the geographical variations of Hinduism is easy to find. It is the same which has created the diversity of Indian languages and dialects. It was natural that Hinduism, whose centre of diffusion in India was the plain between the Sutlej and Jumna, would show an immense range of regional variations as it spread over the rest of the country towards the east, south, west, and north, a process which may have taken centuries.

But this natural and regular evolution does not explain the starkest contrast: that which is seen between the Hinduism of the northern plain and that of the rest of the country, particularly the south. Most observers have been struck by the contrast, and its awareness has created a notion which is fairly widespread, that south India had a cultural individuality of its own, and that in religion as in culture that part of the Indian peninsula had a course of development independent of the north. All kinds of explanations have been given for the contrast, to which the regional sentiment created by the Dravidian languages has given a political expression. But though the contrast is undeniable, the explanations for it are untenable. It was not due to any natural evolution of Hindu life and culture in a special geographical, ethnic, and cultural environment, but was created by political history—to be specific, by the Muslim conquest of northern India and its destructive effect.

Effect of the Muslim Conquest

This can be most conclusively demonstrated by taking the very thing which creates the impression that the south is different from the north. Those who see the two regions exclaim: 'Oh, the south is the land of great temples!' But the simple historical explanation of this fact is that in the south the temples have survived, and in the north they have not. Over seven centuries from the eleventh to the end of the seventeenth all the great cities of northern India dating from Hindu times were sacked by the Muslim invaders and conquerors of India. All the temples there and in all other centres of Hinduism were systematically destroyed. None were left standing at Ujjain, Ajmere, Delhi, Mathura, Brindaban, Kanauj, Prayag,

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or Benares—which were the centres of the political, cultural, and religious life of the Hindus. In most of these places mosques were built on the sites of the temples, and in some with pillars taken from them. This religious vandalism also worked its fury on the Buddhist centres. Moreover, it was not simply that the great temples in the cities were destroyed; so were the village temples. For most of the period of Muslim rule, there was a ban on building new temples and rebuilding the old in the regions the Muslims controlled.

The ban was lifted by Akbar, but this was a short respite. It was then that one of the most original and beautiful temples of northern India was built. It was that of Govindaji at Brindaban. It could not be finished, but like the Unfinished Symphony of Schubert it remains a great work of art. The ban on temples was re-imposed, and a period of iconoclastic fury was witnessed under Shah Jahan (himself the son of a Hindu princess) and Aurangzeb, when even the rebuilt temples were again razed. It was only with the rise of Maratha power in the latter half of the eighteenth century that the destruction ceased and rebuilding began. The Marathas rebuilt Benares. The new temple of Visvanath—the old having been converted into a mosque by Aurangzeb—was built by the Maratha princess Ahilya Bai of the Holkar family, and the famous waterfront of Benares was the creation of other Maratha princes and one Rajput prince.

So it is impossible to judge what Hindu temple architecture was like in its homeland in the greatest age of Hindu civilization. We can only guess from scattered references in secular Sanskrit literature. One Sanskrit epic written at the end of the twelfth century laments the destruction of the temples at Ajmere. It was meant to celebrate the victory of Prithviraj, the Chauhan king, over Muhammad of Ghur in the first battle of Tarain, but the next year this king was defeated and killed, and so the poem was not finished. But it was given a prologue in which the burning of the temples and crashing of their steeples are described.

During all those centuries, all over northern India only ruins of the temples were to be seen. But the Hindus did not forget the houses of their gods. When at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Jesuit priest and mathematician Tiffenthaler travelled from the west coast of India to Malwa he saw in the evenings the flickering lights of the earthen lamps placed in these ruins by the villagers at some risk to themselves. It was only in the

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regions where Muslim power could not penetrate on account of their inaccessibility that the temples escaped destruction, and two of the most notable groups which have survived are those at Khajuraho and Mahoba in Bundelkhand and at Bhuvaneswar, Puri, and Konarak in Orissa. Both the regions were protected by hills and jungles. Even so Orissa suffered a short spell of vandalism in the sixteenth century.

Thus temple architecture in northern India is represented by examples which are provincial and for the most part late. Yet even these examples are so impressive that they are included among the greatest temples to be found in India. The temples at the centres of Hindu political power in the Gangetic plain and in Malwa must have been more numerous and splendid. But they have disappeared, and those which are now seen in these areas are not only smaller but also in a style considerably influenced by Islamic architecture. All this has induced modern observers to give pre-eminence to the south as the land of temples at the expense of the Aryavarta—the home of Hindu culture.

What happened to the temples in northern India happened also to the Hindu princely order and the aristocracy. A majority of them were just exterminated, and the rest fled to the Himalayan foothills. The social and cultural vacuum thus created was filled up by Turkish, Persian, and Afghan colonists and a Muslim aristocracy, and in northern India that substitution was a disaster for every expression of Hindu culture, including religion. The dominant culture in the Gangetic plain became Islamic, and the Hindus became a cultural proletariat. They never recovered their old cultural status during the whole of British rule, and have not done so even today.

Nothing illustrates the transformation of Hindu life in the northern plain better than the change in the economic status and manner of living of the two upper castes, the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, i.e. the priestley and the fighting castes. They were necessarily dependent on the Hindu kings for providing them with livelihood as priests and soldiers, their caste vocations. Deprived of the patronage, both the castes largely adopted agriculture as their main source of living and became peasants. The establishment of British power in India gave both of them a military function, and a majority of the sepoys of the Bengal Army, i.e. the north Indian army of the East India Company,

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came from these two castes. It was they who rose in rebellion against the British at an imagined threat to their religion, and the ruthless suppression of that rising gave a further blow to the higher expression of Hinduism in Hindustan. This new name of *Hindustan* for the Gangetic plain is significant in itself. In Sanskrit this plain, the homeland of Brahmanism, was called the Aryavarta, i.e. the land of the Aryas or Aryans. The new name was Persian.

Thus the course of political history in northern India reduced both Hindu culture and religion to the level of a folk culture and folk religion by depriving it of its élite. Both lost their sophistication and pride. Sanskrit learning virtually disappeared from the region, and orthodoxy in the *mores* became less rigorous. The festivals became more and more democratic, although patronized by the wealthy.

Under Muslim rule there remained in northern India only one social order which still carried on the tradition of a high social and religious culture, and that was the wealthy Bania or commercial class. The Muslims could not do without this class, and by means of its wealth it continued a kind of Hinduism which, though not at the old level, was higher than the Hinduism of the common people of the region.

Nevertheless, an overall denudation could not be avoided. This is comparable to the geographical change that has come over the Gangetic basin through deforestation and denudation of the soil. The forests of that region have become scrub; so have culture and religion in a figurative sense. Thus Hindu culture here wears an appearance of poverty which was not its old condition. It is the religious expression of this culture, which is the 'popular Hinduism' of English writers. In reality it was only the remnant, the detritus of the old Hinduism.

Comparison of this kind of survival with a higher kind in the south created an impression of the superiority of the latter. The contrast was noticed even by the earliest writers on India. They were led to think that in northern India Hinduism hardly existed, because they had made their first acquaintance with it in the more elaborate form it had in the south. Robert Orme, the first historian of British India, noted in the first volume of his history published in 1763 that 'the northern nations of India, although idolaters, having scarce a religion, when compared with

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the multitudes of superstitions and ceremonies which characterize the inhabitants of southern countries, were easily induced to embrace Mahomedanism'. In saying this Orme was really mistaking the effect for the cause. The Hindus of northern India did not embrace Islam because they had no religion; their religion was reduced to its lowest denominator owing to the Muslim conquest.

It should, however, be kept in mind that within these two very large blocs of Hinduism created in north and south India by history, there were differences which created smaller blocs. In the south the Tamil-speaking Hindus constituted the most important and typical group, while those who spoke Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam were associated groups, not minor in themselves, but less assertive and with less prestige derived from the places of pilgrimage and temples than the Tamil area.

In the north, on the other hand, the Hindus of the Punjab had a form of religion which was simpler even than that of the Gangetic plain. In their manners and external ways they were very largely Islamized, and most of them till recently read even their own religious books in Urdu translations, because they could not read the Deva Nagari script. But so far as writing was concerned, it must be remembered that the north-west of India had the right-to-left style of writing from very ancient times. Under Muslim rule, and also with competition facing them from both Islam and Sikhism, the Hindu content of their faith became very elementary.

To sum up the matter, the Muslim conquest pulverized Hinduism in the northern plain, but left it as an old and yet inhabited building in the south. There is no reason to assume that before the Muslim conquest Hindu culture and religion were in any significant way different in the two regions. It must not be forgotten that the most famous commentator of the Vedas, Sayana, and the greatest exponent of philosophic Brahmanism, Saṃkara, came from the south.

Peripheral Hinduism of Northern India

This conclusion is supported by all the features of Hinduism as it is in the peripheral regions of northern India, namely, Bengal taken with Orissa and Assam, Nepal and the sub-Himalayan regions, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. The Maharashtra country may

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be added to these. The forms of Hinduism in these areas, when taken as a whole, are closer to the form in the south than to that of the Gangetic plain, and besides they exhibit greater similarities among themselves even when separated by large intervening regions, than to the areas adjacent to them on the Gangetic plain. For instance, the cult of the Mother Goddess is virtually absent in the Ganges basin, but is found in Rajputana, Nepal, and Bengal. Also, the paintings of the hill Rajput schools show that the Krishna cult in the sub-Himalayan regions of the north-west is the same as in Bengal. In fact, the paintings most often illustrate the themes found in the *Gita-Govinda*, a famous poem of the Krishna cult written in Bengal.

In none of these regions was the continuity of the highest Hindu traditions ever broken, and both learning and orthodoxy stood behind the practice of the religion. Therefore the Hinduism of the peripheral regions must be taken as the true surviving form of the Hinduism of the north as it was before the Muslim conquest. Furthermore, these, together with the forms in the south, have to be taken as the most sophisticated expression of the religion to come down to modern times.

But there was a difference of attitudes between the north and the south even when the forms were similar, and this too was due to political history. This is best illustrated by comparing the Hindu spirit in Bengal with that in the south. For the greater part of their rule in India the Muslims never penetrated the deep south, and though they ruled in the Deccan and also in the Carnatic, their domination was merely political. They did not establish colonies except in Hyderabad and a few other cities under the rule of the Nizam of the Deccan. What was more important, no extensive conversion of the lower classes of the Hindus took place at all. Even the political domination of the Muslims was a loose military suzerainty, which left local government in the hands of the smaller chiefs, some of whom were called Polygars. The social and religious life of the Hindus was left unaffected by Muslim rule.

Thus control of the social, cultural, and religious life of the Hindus of the south, more especially in the Tamil country, remained in the hands of the Brahmins, who maintained it undisputed till the beginning of this century. The power of the Brahmins also meant the hold of the older and higher form of Hinduism, because of their knowledge of Sanskrit. Though the

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spoken and written mother tongue of the Brahmins was Tamil or some other language of the so-called Dravidian family, they had a knowledge of Sanskrit which was not surpassed in the north, and was often deeper. Secular life of the region remained wholly within the framework set by Hinduism.

Hinduism in Bengal was different due to the political history of the province. It was conquered by the Muslims at the same time as northern India, and they ruled the province till the coming of the British. Political power became so closely associated with Islam that even a Hindu who had asserted independence and became a king embraced the religion. Moreover, during the centuries of Muslim rule a very large number of low-caste Hindus were converted to Islam. Thus in Bengal there was Muslim domination at the top, and a heavy Muslim ballast at the bottom.

None the less, the social, cultural, and religious life of high-caste Bengalis was left untouched. The reason was that the rule of the Muslims in Bengal was purely military with a very loose administrative organization. With the exception of a small number of Turks, Persians, and Afghans at the top there was no colonization by any large body of Muslims of non-Indian origins. Furthermore, for more than half the period of Muslim rule the Muslim kings of the province were independent of the centre in Delhi. So these rulers had to work with the local artistocracy and gentry, instead of dispossessing them. Actually, in the eighteenth century Hindus held very high positions in the top ranks of the administration, and the lower ranks of the revenue collectors were composed almost entirely of Hindus from the upper castes. Thus the higher administration in Bengal could not afford to be anti-Hindu.

On the other hand, the Bengali converts to Islam who came from the lower castes did not acquire the convert's fanaticism. They had become used to a subordinate position, and did not aspire to a dominant one even though they had adopted the religion of the ruling order. Besides, their Islamization was very imperfect. They joined the Hindu religious festivals and even ceremonies, and furnished musicians for them. Some Muslims even wrote Bengali poetry, and some of it on mythological subjects. So Hinduism was not only spared in Bengal, but actually flourished at a level not seen in the Gangetic plain. Bengal even sent pundits

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to Benares and Brindaban and kept up the tradition of Hindu learning in upper India.

Through this kind of survival Hinduism in Bengal remained at the same level of sophistication as it had in the south. But there was a qualitative difference between the conservatism of Bengal and of the Tamil country. In the latter the existence of Hindu culture and religion had not been threatened, and therefore the Brahmins and the upper castes were internally stable, self-confident, and unaggressive in their traditionalism. They exercised repression only in respect of the old enemy of Brahmanism in the south, the non-Aryan local population, who were represented by the untouchable castes and classes. Their treatment of the Untouchables, though a very cruel form of apartheid, was accepted without protest.

In Bengal, on the contrary, the presence of the Muslims, both as rulers and as a large internal proletariat, was a continuing threat, not so much from any kind of Islamic zeal which they might have, as from the temptations held out to the Hindus. Muslim rule had brought about an internal dichotomy in the life of high-cast Hindus. For the sake of livelihood and also to rise to a high worldly position very large numbers of them had to be in the employment of the Muslim rulers. In these posts, especially the higher ones, they had to put on Muslim clothes, adopt Muslim manners, speak and write the Persian language. The landowners when they were of the highest rank, also affected the clothes of the Muslim nobility and spoke Persian. In doing all these they could easily overstep the permissible limits and disregard the rules of Hindu private life. So sanctions had to be imposed against such transgression.

Thus strict observance of all Hindu rules of conduct was enforced with very great rigour, and the old taboos against non-Hindu ways were made even more compulsory than before. Brahmanic conservatism in Bengal added a sharp edge to the old rigidity, and became something like Catholicism after the Counter-Reformation. The pundits not only remained the guardians and exponents of the ancient sacred law known as *Smriti*, but also promulgated a new and very elaborate *Smriti* themselves. A new and rigorous code of sacred law promulgated by the most famous of the Bengali authorities on it, the Smarta Raghunandana, regulated every aspect of Hindu personal conduct in Bengal, and

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was obeyed by all. The gentry co-operated with the pundits in ensuring this conformity. Thus in Bengal, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, owing to the ever-present threat from the Muslims, Hinduism had become intolerant and dour in its attitude. It had developed a fanaticism of which all Bengalis with non-conformist inclinations were afraid.

Aboriginal Areas of Central India

There is one more important geographical and ethnic bloc of Hinduism to be considered. It is quite another world even in the fantastic world of Hinduism. It is contained within the hilly regions of central India, and its Hinduism is that of the primitive tribes who had moved into the perimeter of the religion in ancient times or were doing so in the nineteenth century. Hardly anything was known about it before the latter half of that century when English anthropologists and other investigators began to record the life and institutions of the aboriginals. In giving an account of it I shall depend on the authority of one who knew it at first hand and left descriptions of it. He was Sir Alfred Lyall, who saw and studied this form of Hinduism in one of the backward regions of India, Berar in central India. His account is to be found in the gazeteer of this province and in an article published in the *Fortnightly Review* (February 1872). Though this part of the aboriginal region was more Hinduized than others and there were perceptible differences in the degree of permeation by Hindu influences among the aboriginals, Berar provided a typical illustration of the manner in which they took over Hinduism. There is no better way of describing it than in the words of Lyall. He wrote:

> The cultus of the elder or classic Hindu pantheon is only a portion of the popular religion of the country. Here in India, more than in any other part of the world, do men worship most what they understand least. Not only do they adore all strange phenomena and incomprehensible forces—being driven by incessant awe of the invisible powers to propitiate every unusual shape or striking natural object—but their pantheistic piety leads them to invest with a mysterious potentiality the animals which are most useful to man, and even the implements of a profitable trade.

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In his article Lyall described the character of the Hinduism of the people of this province in these words: 'Now just as the word Hindu is no national or even geographical denomination, but signifies vaguely a fortuitous conglomeration of sects, tribes, races, hereditary professions, and pure castes, so the religion of this population of Hindus is at first sight a heterogeneous confusion.' He gave a list of the objects of worship:

1. The worship of mere stocks and stones, and of local configurations, which are unusual or grotesque in size, shape, or pōsition.
2. The worship of things inanimate, which are gifted with mysterious motion.
3. The worship of animals which are feared.
4. The worship of visible things animate or inanimate, which are directly or indirectly useful and profitable, or which possess any incomprehensible function or property.
5. The worship of Deo, or spirit, a thing without form and void—the vague impersonation of the uncanny sensation that comes over one at certain places.
6. The worship of dead relatives, and other deceased persons known in their life-time to the worshippers.
7. The worship at shrines of persons who had a great reputation during life, or who died in some strange or notorious way.
8. The worship in temples of persons belonging to the foregoing class, as demigods or subordinate deities.
9. The worship of the manifold local incarnations of the elder deities and of their symbols.
10. The worship of departmental deities.
11. The worship of the supreme gods of Hinduism, and of their ancient incarnations and personifications, handed down by the Brahmanic scriptures.

Lyall explains that these divisions in no way denote separate bodies of votaries, nor do they correspond even with any parallel steps of civilized intelligence or social position. This is an acute and profound observation, for nothing in Hinduism is exclusive of anything else, nor is the normal cultural and educational level of a Hindu any indication of the level or levels at which he might believe. So Lyall observed: 'The average middle-class Hindu might be brought by one part or another of his everyday religious practice within any or many of these classes.' Thus it would be a mistake to regard the type of Hinduism found among the aboriginals as their exclusive possession, and it would be equally a

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mistake to think that only primitive beliefs and practices were their sole religious experience.

Significance of the Geographical Diversities

It has been considered necessary to give a schematic view of the large geographical blocs of Hinduism because otherwise there would be either an abstraction from the reality or its falsification. In writing about Hinduism there is every temptation to avoid trouble by representing one form as the sole form or a complete expression of the whole religious complex. There is a greater chance of overlooking the important fact that the political history of each region has given to its Hinduism a special character, so that the form seen in it cannot be said to have been brought into existence by a self-contained religious evolution. In particular, the distinction between popular Hinduism and the higher Hinduism is seen to be the product of political history. Last of all, a bird's-eye-view of Hinduism *in situ*, so to speak, is indispensable to correct the worst misrepresentation of all—that is, a reconstruction from the sacred texts.

None the less, the geographical diversities should not be overemphasized. They have not created any exclusive loyalty to a particular regional form. A group of Hindus might live in a particular region, and normally confine their religious life to the practices found there. But they would never show any exclusiveness in doing so, far less any hostility to the beliefs and practices of other localities. No south Indian will think that Benares or the Ganges is less sacred to him than Madura or the Cauveri, and in exactly the same way no north Indian will undervalue the sacred places or rivers of the south. Actually, it is in regard to the geographical diversity of their religion that the Hindus are most ecumenical. The last of the five obligatory duties of Islam, which are called its pillars, is to complete a Muslim's adherence to it by going to the place of its origin and centre of diffusion, Mecca. In contrast, the Hindu seeks to do so by visiting the farthest places his religion has reached in the course of its expansion. Therefore, he thinks he has not arrived at the fullness of his religious life unless he has made his pilgrimage to Amarnath, Badrinath, or Pashupatinath in the Himalayan fastnesses; Somnath on the Arabian Sea; Puri on the Bay of Bengal; Rameshwaram or

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Kanyakumari on the Indian Ocean; Jwalamukhi in the Punjab hills; or Kamrup in Assam.

As to deities, no Hindu will withhold his faith in or devotion to any Hindu deity, whoever might be his particular local, personal deity. Kali in Calcutta, Siva at Benares, Krishna at Mathura or Brindaban are gods for all Hindus.

Over and above, the Hindus wherever they might live, have a uniform and coherent outlook on religion. This similarity is seen in the religious position taken by them and not in the identity of cults and rituals. While Hindu religious beliefs and practices are multiform, the Hindu religious outlook is very unitary. Wherever they come from, the Hindus will hold the same view of the deity, express the same views about religious life, and put forward the same apologia for their religion. It is in this that the true unity of Hinduism is to be seen. It is more a particular religious outlook than a particular religion.

The existence of this unity is all the more marvellous because it has not been created by propaganda or intercommunication. On the contrary, the intercommunication has been created by it. Of course, it has its agencies and instruments. The unity has been maintained by the priestly class, the Brahmins, whose mode of life all over India remains the least affected by social changes; by the prevalence of the Sanskrit language, which has maintained the unity of ideology in the Hindu order as effectually as Arabic has done in the Islamic world; and by the corpus of standard religious texts collectively known as the Sastras. But, above all, there has been a subtle exhalation which has created a single atmosphere. Owing to all this there is a general loyalty to the religion which nothing can shake.

Class Differences: Priests and the Aristocracy

The final category of differences in the spirit and practice of Hinduism is the product of social stratifications in Hindu society. These are seen even within a region which is linguistically and culturally homogeneous, because this homogeneity has not prevented Hinduism from being different in complexion in the various classes. At the top of the superimposed varieties is the Hinduism of the priestly class, the landed aristocracy, and the commercial class.

To take the priestly class first, among them Hinduism was seen

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in a form which has undergone hardly any modification since ancient times, that is, with all the routine of rituals and observances laid down in the sacred texts, including the Vedic. A majority of the Brahmins who followed the profession of priests knew these texts, especially the liturgical, only by rote, and performed the rites and ceremonies more or less mechanically for the sake of a living. But among the Brahmins there was also a *corps d'élite*, the pundits, who were deep students of Hindu sacred law and philosophy, though at times they also took part in the rites of marriage and funerals *(Sradh)*. Their normal occupation was performance of all the rites, initiation and supervision of their spiritual clients as Gurus, the study of sacred text, and teaching young students. In fact, only these men performed the function of the Brahmin caste as laid down in the Sastras. They held the conscience of all lay Hindus, who in all matters of orthodoxy and correctness appealed to them. They enjoyed great authority and respect, and exercised the function of spiritual directors both as individuals with a reputation for learning, and as members of a family with hereditary spiritual clients, even though without learning. It was by them again that Hindu philosophy of different schools was studied and the continuity of the philosophical tradition maintained. Along with these, they were also the custodians of secular Sanskrit literature and the grammar of the language. Personally, these pundits were extremely strict and scrupulous in adhering to the old Hindu way down to the smallest details of daily life, and they always depended on the authority of the sacred texts in their preaching as well as practice. Not even the Pharisees were more rigorous about their Law.

Thus at this level Hindu religious life presented a very austere, self-confident, and arrogant form with a hidebound system of rituals and observances as its content. But the outlook and habits of the pundits, though almost fossilized, showed an intense vitality in the aggressive dogmatism of the whole class. These men were the defenders of the Hindu way of life, to which, as has been pointed out, an ever-present threat was created by the presence of Islam in India. The Muslims were proselytizers by principle, and showed themselves active in this. They brought about massive defections from the Hindu order. But even within that order they were insidiously dangerous, for they tempted the Hindus sorely and often successfully to be lax in maintaining the Hindu *mores*,

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not only in regard to religion strictly so-called, but also in such things as clothing, eating, care of the person, and toilet. The Brahmin priests and pundits kept such irregularities in check, by punishing transgressions when they passed the permissible limit. They could do so because they had to be obeyed. No Hindu could perform any of the numerous rites, or conduct the worship of the gods, on which their temporal as well as spiritual welfare depended without them. Hindu excommunication was to put a man outside the caste and this power belonged to the Brahmins.

But the class expression of Hinduism had also a more human and easy aspect, which had nothing of the cold aloofness of the religious life of the priestly Brahmins. This was seen in the observances of those who had a high worldly position, namely, the Hindu princes where they existed, the Hindu landed aristocracy, and also the commercial aristocracy. The princes and the landowners could belong to any caste, from the highest to the lowest as defined in the Sastras, and they did. The commercial aristocracy was overwhelmingly of the Vaisya or trading class, though men of other castes including even Brahmins could belong to it. The unity of these classes lay in their wealth and social position, and thus their religious life, too, had great worldly splendour.

Privately, the twice-born in the upper social classes observed the routine of daily life which was laid down in the sacred books or was customary in the class, but the observance was less rigorous and elaborate than among the Brahmin pundits. Their life was in the world, and the typical expression of their religiosity was also worldly. It was to be seen mainly in temple worship and seasonal festivals, both of which were performed with a good deal of pomp. It was in the Hinduism of these men that its full social functioning could be seen, and in it the social and the religious elements were so intermingled that the two could hardly be separated.

These classes played a very important role in the preservation of Hinduism. They were, figuratively speaking, the patrons of the gods in the world, for the gods owed their temples to them. The wealthy landed and commercial families built and endowed temples and created religious trusts from which the worship of the gods was maintained.

These classes were, of course, the economic patrons of the priests and pundits. The relations between them and the sacred order were very close. In one aspect of their religious role the

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upper classes constituted the secular arm of Hinduism, reproducing in a devolved form the relationship which existed in ancient times between the king and the priest. In another aspect they provided financial support for the priestly class. They made gifts of money and goods to the priests on all ceremonial occasions, bestowed rent-free land on them, and also provided regular salaried employment to the lower priests for the performance of all routine worship and rites in their homes.

They were in a figurative sense the owners of the religion, which the Brahmins were not. Just as in Hindu law all land belonged to the king and was only usufructuary to all others—which was the principle behind the land revenue system—the religion, too, belonged to the ruler as its protector. When and where the Muslims and after them the British ruled in India, only the right in land passed to them as the new sovereign order, not the right over the religion. It remained with the Hindu princes where they existed, but elsewhere was taken over and exercised by the Hindu landed and commercial aristocracy. To give two examples, in the second half of the eighteenth century the temple of Visvanath at Benares was rebuilt by the Maratha princess Ahilya Bai of the House of Holkar, but the new temples to Krishna at Mathura and Brindaban were built by the great Seths of Mathura.

These patrons of Hinduism did not make use of their connection with it for profit, except when they created religious trusts out of their own properties for the regular worship in perpetuity of a particular deity in a temple built by them. In that case, they took for themselves whatever was left after the service of the gods.[1] In the exercise of their ownership of the religion they were, however, more trustees than beneficiaries. All the monetary gains from Hinduism, which though immense were diffused, were for the Brahmin priests. The secular patrons of the religion regarded it as a heritage and trust which they had to preserve even if they could not augment it. The religious function of this class was thus somewhat akin to the political function of a feudal aristocracy.

The true character of their patronage of religion was seen even more clearly in the way the aristocracy allowed the common people to join in and see the worship and festivities, and also to

[1] To give a small personal example, my great-great-grandfather built a temple to Kali and endowed it with a part of our property, and down to my young days we used to get some money from the surplus.

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bring in their offerings as outsiders, though the services were performed at the cost of the owners and were meant in the first instance for their own spiritual benefit. As the entrepreneurs of the festivals these classes never thought of reserving them for their private enjoyment. The common people of the village or town came and took part in them as if in the religious sphere too, they were what they were in regard to the land which they tilled for the owners, namely, cultivating tenants. The temples which the upper classes owned were all open to the general public. In this way the aristocracy maintained the hold of the highest existing form of Hinduism over the common people, in which these latter would have had no share if they had stood on their own.

Mass Expression

However, the common people had a Hinduism of their own, which was not only practised by them, but was also kept in a living state as a folk religious culture by means of a process which might be called spontaneous regeneration or replenishment. This was the form called 'Popular Hinduism' by British writers, and they saw that it was in many ways very different from the Hinduism of the scriptures and tradition. L. S. S. O'Malley, who has written a book on this form of Hinduism, giving to it the sub-title, 'The Religion of the Masses', wrote in his preface: 'India has been described as a land of contrasts, but in nothing are the contrasts more marked than in Hinduism, in which the differences between the beliefs and practices of the cultured classes and those of the masses, mostly unlettered villagers, are so great that they almost seem to be differences of kind rather than degree.'

In this Hinduism the hieratic character was subordinate, and the conscious historical tradition was absent. It existed in a perpetual *now*, though certainly it had come down from the past, and perhaps bore the same relation to the higher Hinduism as the dialects of the countryside in India bear to the literary language, or the relationship which sand and mud have to the sedimentary strata of stone in the same sea-bed. Looked at from the point of cultural anthropology, it was a folk culture and not a civilized culture. It was therefore more self-supporting and less dependent than higher Hinduism on conscious transmission for its perpetuation.

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But even popular Hinduism had different layers and was not all one. It had a very characteristic expression among the small tradesmen, craftsmen, and prosperous agriculturists. The religion of these classes was nourished not only by the spoken word, but also by the written word, embodied in vernacular renderings of the old Hindu myths, legends, and spiritual teaching. It was more especially under the sway of the popular prophets, who preached wholly within the mode of *Bhakti* or love, and therefore it was more emotional. Again, it was from these classes that the popular preachers and minor prophets mostly emerged. The peasantry took part in the religious life of all the classes in a very simple and loose way. What they received from this religion was what they were capable by their mental development of receiving. No upper class put any religious pressure on them.

Nomadic Expression

The three expressions of Hinduism described so far, namely, the priestly, the aristocractic, and the popular, were all contained within the settled and sedentary social life of the Hindus. In addition to these, there was also an unsocial if not anti-social expression of the religion. This was to be found among men who had left the world to lead a life devoted to religion either as individuals or as members of groups organized in mendicant orders. The individual holy men lived as hermits in forests or mountains by themselves, subsisting largely on voluntary charities from nearby villages. They also travelled a good deal and in some cases settled temporarily or permanently in places of pilgrimage like Benares, and lived on gifts from the pilgrims. Some of them became not only famous but even legendary.

Men in the world tried to exploit their holiness sometimes from a religious motive, that is, for the sake of spiritual guidance, but most often to profit in the worldly way by means of the supernatural powers with which they were credited. But as a rule the individual holy men remained aloof from society, and were thoroughly egoistic. They had broken completely with their social origins and family ties, and so could not disclose their origins. From very ancient times these men presented themselves as the typical representatives of Hinduism, especially to foreigners. By the eighteenth century they had become timeless, though

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continuing a very ancient institution of Hinduism, whose existence is historically proved.

But the great majority of the nomadic followers of Hinduism were predatory. That is to say, they were not simply benign parasites on society like the recluses, but lived on it by extorting their living from lay Hindus either through a spontaneous submission or by actual robbery and plunder. Their normal life was one of wandering in groups large or small. They came to the great religious gatherings like the Kumbha Mela in very large numbers, each sect or order with its distinctive insignia, regimented and drilled; and at times they fought with the other orders for precedence. They were very truculent and carried tongs, tridents, staves, and brass pots, all of which they used as weapons when occasion arose. All of them were addicts of cannabis and other drugs. If their relationship with society could be regarded as any kind of symbiosis it was like the relation the prowling leopards have with human habitations. These animals usually kill game or stray cattle, but when short of food also raid the village byres.

The ascetics were also capable of organized raids and plunder. At the beginning of British rule they looted villages in north Bengal on their way to Jagannath in Orissa. Warren Hastings reported to the Court of Directors of the East India Company that they were in the habit of making incursions annually into Bengal, which was the Company's territory, from the north-west. In 1772 and 1773 they became very aggressive and came in bands varying in strength from 1,000 to 10,000 Sanyasis (ascetics). They actually succeeded in destroying two detachments of the Company's troops under Captains Thomas and Edwards and killing both of them. In 1773 five battalions of regular sepoys had to be deployed to drive them out of Bengal.

Warren Hastings wrote that their appearances were very sudden: 'for in spite of the strictest orders issued and the severest penalties threatened to the inhabitants, in case they fail in giving intelligence of the approaches of the Senassies, they are so infatuated by superstition, as to be backward in giving the information, so that the banditti are sometimes advanced into the very heart of our provinces, before we know anything of their motions; as if they dropt from heaven to punish the inhabitants for their folly.' Usually, they avoided engagements, and retreated before the troops could catch up with them. This was regretted by

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Hastings, and he hoped that some of the Company's detachments might fall in with the parties and punish them in an exemplary manner for their audacity.

It was believed that the so-called Sanyasis were not all members of the well-known orders, but poor peasants turned into ascetics for a share of the plunder. But even now the bands of these ascetics are very large when seen at the great festivals, and it was quite possible that many of the raiding gangs belonged to the well-known orders. What they did during the Governor-Generalship of Hastings was a repetition in miniature of the raids of the Marathas thirty years before, and an anticipation of the depredations of the Pindaris fifty years later. In fact, these wandering Sadhus were the spiritual wing of the secular robber bands of India.

Even in more quiet times and more settled regions they created troubles for the villagers. The Abbé Dubois in his book wrote that, when going on their pilgrimages, they travelled in bands numbering at times even up to a thousand, and they collected food by begging in the villages through which they passed. 'Their manner when demanding alms', Dubois wrote, 'is most insolent and audacious, and often threatening.' 'If their demands are not instantly complied with,' he added, 'they will noisily repeat their request, striking their gongs and producing the most deafening sounds from their *sangus* (conch shells) all the time. If such methods are not successful, they have been known to force their way into a house, break all household utensils, and damage everything they can find.'

They also accompanied their begging with dancing and singing. Of this performance Dubois wrote: 'Their songs are a species of hymns in honour of their deities; and they very often sing indecent ballads. The more freely the latter are interlarded with obscenities, the better are they calculated to attract offerings from the public.'

Nowadays the Sadhus are seen individually and in small parties when they come to the towns and villages to collect money or food, and in large bands formed by the orders only on the occasions when there are great bathing festivals. But, whatever the manner of their appearance, they pursue a profession as well as a vocation.

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Chapter Three

INTRINSIC DIVERSITY

WHAT has been written in the previous chapter will have given some idea of the diversity of Hinduism when seen in its geographical, social, and political setting. This alone makes the task of describing the religion difficult enough. But with time and labour it is possible to compile a full account of all its regional variants, and such an encyclopaedia will be far less voluminous than even one of the series on Christianity published by the Abbé Migne, namely, the *Encyclopédie théologique* in 171 volumes. A *catalogue raisonné* of all the beliefs, practices, and sects of the Hindus would require far fewer volumes. And such an account will no more baffle the mind than a tropical forest will overwhelm a trained ecologist.

But it is altogether a different matter with the intrinsic character of Hinduism. A confrontation with its multitudinous features will reveal a mental world which will have a shattering effect on the intellectual faculties, for nothing in it will seem to conform to any logic. The more one studies the details of the religion the more bewildering does it seem. It is not simply that one cannot form a clear-cut intellectual idea of the whole complex, it is not possible even to come away with a coherent emotional reaction. This is the case even with a short text like the *Katha Upanishad*. After reading it with the utmost concentration a reader who does not impose his own fancies on it and supply a connecting thread out of his own head, will find that his eyes have been dazzled by a number of flashes in the dark, but that he has not been in an illuminated room. To read the older Upanishads like the *Chandogya* or the *Brihadaranyaka* is still more puzzling. Even to read the *Gita*, which has a distinct and powerful religious message of its own, leaves an impression of inconsistency in thought and feeling because it has so many other things which do not harmonize with the central theme.

Students of Hinduism soon become like wanderers in a forest who can no longer find the notches they made on the trees to guide them. They become imbued with its *Deo*, formless spirit,

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which haunts the jungle. They rave about the spiritual mysteries of Hinduism, not realizing that the impression of mystery and awe arises from the paralysing blow which its amorphousness gives to those who cannot bring their intellect to bear on it. Even those who do not lose their head cannot help feeling its eeriness. It would seem that Hinduism, whose inmost core is a persistent animism, has created an animism of its own which takes possession of those who come in contact with it without intellectual inoculation. Then it becomes impossible to perceive the concreteness of the religion, which has been so emphasized in the introduction.

Another intellectual failure is to seek any kind of unity in Hinduism. Yet that is precisely what many Europeans have sought to do. This inclination is due to the rational cast of the European mind which makes this mind almost irrational in dealing with Hinduism. As Lyall put it, the European mind has 'the inveterate modern habit of assuming all great historical names to represent something definite, symmetrical, and organized, as if Asiatic institutions were capable of being circumscribed by rules and formal definitions.' To ask for a definition of Hinduism has become a habit even with the Westernized Hindus of today.

But English writers who have written about Hinduism from direct observation have never committed the mistake of regarding it as a unity. Actually, they were almost reduced to despair in writing about it. For instance, Monier-Williams, who wrote his book on Hinduism from his knowledge of the Sanskrit texts as well as from information derived from the Hindu pundits and reformers, asked the question: 'If such all-comprehensive breadth and diversity are essential features of Hinduism, is it possible to give a concise description of it which shall be intelligible and satisfactory?' His description of the diversity in Hinduism considered as a religion in the European sense was very vivid and, of course, correct. He wrote:

> It is all tolerant, all compliant, all comprehensive, all-absorbing. It has its spiritual and its material aspect, its esoteric and exoteric, its subjective and objective, its rational and its irrational, its pure and its impure. It may be compared to a huge polygon, or irregular multilateral figure. It has one side for the practical, another for the severely moral, another for the devotional and imaginative, another for the sensuous and sensual, and another for the philosophical and speculative. Those who rest in ceremonial observances

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find it all-sufficient; those who deny the efficacy of works, and make faith the one requisite, need not wander from its pale; those who are addicted to sensual objects may have their tastes gratified; those who delight in meditating on the nature of God and Man, the relation of matter and spirit, the mystery of separate existence, and the origin of evil, may here indulge their love of speculation. And this capacity for almost endless expansion causes almost endless sectarian divisions even among the followers of any particular line of doctrine.

Considered as a whole, Hinduism suggests certain images from the world of plants, where vegetation relentlessly proliferates and expands. Monier-Williams wrote that Hinduism was like 'the sacred fig-tree of India (the banyan—*ficus bengalensis*), which from a single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves, till the parent stock is lost in a dense forest of its own offshoots.' Lyall also wrote: 'Nowhere but in India can we now survey with our eyes an indigenous polytheism in full growth, flourishing like a secular green bay-tree among a people of ancient culture.'

One might also apply to Hinduism some notions of Hindu philosophy and logic. Of the Universal Soul *(Atman)* Hindu philosophy says that to every description or classification only one reply is possible: *Neti, Neti,* Not this, not this. So to every definition of Hinduism one is compelled to say that it does not apply. Hindu logic has the parable of the elephant and the blind men—*andha-hasti-nyaya.* It describes how a group of blind men wanted to form an idea of the shape of an elephant by touching its different limbs. Touching the trunk one of them said that it was like a pipe, touching the leg another said that it was like a pillar, touching the tail a third said that it was like a rope, and so on. Most descriptions of Hinduism tend to be like this. In any case, in them there is always an emphasis on a part at the expense of the whole. Unfortunately, there is no means of wholly avoiding this kind of misrepresentation in a short book on Hinduism.

Another temptation is to omit those features of Hinduism which offend certain modern susceptibilities. This was particularly strong in the nineteenth century. Today the temptation is rather to dwell on those very features. In an objective description of this religion the impression it is likely to produce is better disregarded. On the whole, Hinduism can afford to reveal itself honestly.

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Diversities Left by History

Among the internal diversities in the beliefs and practices of Hinduism those created by its evolution must be described first. In its existence at any point of time, today or two hundred years ago, there can be seen an intermingling of beliefs, practices, and experiences coming down from all the known stages of its growth. That is to say, the features of the religion which can be found side by side and simultaneously now, would illustrate almost completely the whole course of evolution it has undergone, just as geological strata illustrate the history of the earth. Sometimes they are present as fully functional features and at others as vestigial.

No feature which is known from the oldest texts to have formed part of Hinduism has been totally lost as has been the pre-Zoroastrian polytheism in Persia. In some cases they have been substantially transformed. None the less, the line of descent remains clear. Thus it happens that, in order to become a coherent and logical system, Hinduism has not shed any of its features in the course of its evolution. For this reason current Hinduism may also be seen as a museum of its entire history. However, it is also a museum of the history of religion all over the world. If the study of Sanskrit gave rise to the science of Comparative Philology, Hinduism gave the initial stimulus to the comparative study of religions. Anthropologists took the study of religion further, but, if they did so by the study of religion among the primitive peoples, they could easily have found the same sort of data in Hinduism. A book like Frazer's *Golden Bough* could be written on the basis of the beliefs and practices of the Hindus alone. All the features of primitive religions, animism, animatism, magic, fetishism, shamanism, etc., may be found in their undisguised forms in the current religious life of the Hindus. Rising from these foundations Hinduism in its superstructure rises to heights at which it is not simply mystical, but succeeds in converting religion into philosophy. And too often this philosophy is regarded as the true Hindu religion, which it is not.

Diversity of Belief

A religion which has been deposited in this manner by its own evolution could have no creed or kerygma, and Hinduism never

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had any. A Hindu is under no compulsion to subscribe to any dogma or profess faith in a particular thing. So, among the Hindus, heresy is not a matter of belief. There is a Sanskrit word, *pashanda*, which is translated into English as 'heretic', but it only means a person who is un-Hindu in his conduct and behaviour, who neglects Hindu observances, and disregards Hindu taboos. It is not possible to find doctrinal heresy in Hinduism because Hinduism has no fixed doctrine.

This is the basis of the much-advertised Hindu religious tolerance. Since a Hindu has not arrived at any exclusive belief in one God or many gods, it is natural for him to regard any kind of belief as true. With a whole range of beliefs which he accepts as equally true, or at all events true for the person who holds it, he can hardly deny the truth of any other religion. Thus modern Hindus have always considered the Christian denial of salvation to those who do not put faith in the Christian kerygma to be a monstrous perversion of religion. A Hindu's exclusiveness is social: it is created, in the first instance, by his birth which makes him one individual among a chosen people by divine right, and after that by his *mores*, which he regards as superior to everybody else's.

Thus it is as difficult to say what exactly a Hindu believes as it is to discover what he does not. In regard to the very wide choice of cults and observances open to him within the framework of his religion he would follow the motto: Preferences or a preference, but no exclusions whatever. He might even extend his faith to a number of dogmas which are utterly inconsistent with one another without any awareness of the inconsistencies. He is capable of reconciling and uniting them with the help of his faith. Thus the unity of Hinduism lies in the Hindu's unlimited capacity for faith, and not on the oneness of the object of his faith.

But though the objects are many they are all distinguishable. At the same time, they stand at different levels of consciousness, and can therefore be divided into groups. In the foreground stands one object of faith for all Hindus. It is a genuine, monotheistic, personal God. It is impossible to determine when the presence of this God came to be felt by them. He is certainly not derived from the impersonal and abstract one God—*Brahman* or *Atman* (Oversoul) of Upanishadic mysticism or later philosophy. Though in certain parts of India this one God is referred to as

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Paramatma (Supreme Soul), the affiliation is simply verbal. For all practical purposes, the abstract God has no place in Hindu worship. For many centuries discussion about him has not been religious even, but only philosophical.

The one God to which I am referring here is a Hindu form of the Christian and Islamic God. The most common name under which he is referred to is Bhagavan. Though he is a personal God, he is never thought of or spoken about as an anthropomorphic God in a physical form. Actually, no physical form is ever assigned to him, though he is a full anthropomorphic psychic entity. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is personified compassion and justice at the same time.

The Hindus always turn to him when they are in trouble, in all their sorrows and suffering, but never when prosperous. They would say to others: God will show you mercy, God will judge your actions, or God will not allow this. No particular, individualized, anthropomorphic god of the old Hindu pantheon ever fulfilled this role with any Hindu. To the other gods of Hinduism, even when thought of as a supreme god, the Hindus looked with some confidence based on his right to ask for divine help, since through worship he was performing his part of the contract and giving the god his *quid pro quo*. But to this God, Bhagavan, he appealed when he was wholly without any resource, yet he did so with complete faith in his mercy.

Nevertheless, this Bhagavan has never been worshipped, nor has he even been an object of regular prayer. St Paul said to the Athenians that He whom they worshipped as the Unknown God was being proclaimed to them by him. To the Hindus this Unknown God was fully known, but never worshipped. In the whole religious literature of the Hindus there is no discussion of the nature of this God. Yet in one sense this undiscussed God is the only real God of Hindu faith.

Below this God there was the specific world of the Hindu gods, who are to be found in Hindu mythology and theogony, but whose nature and functions Hindu scriptures have made as difficult as possible to understand. If it had not been for Hindu practice no one would have succeeded in placing them in Hindu religious life. These gods belong to Hindu polytheism, but the three most important divinities stand in a sphere where there is complete coalescence of monotheism and polytheism. In Hinduism, as in Greek

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and Roman religions, monotheism never excluded polytheism, and *vice versa*. But Hinduism is unique in this respect, that out of its polytheism it has not created a simple monotheism, but one which is polymorphous because it is one monotheism with three gods.

This aspect of Hindu monotheism has not been sufficiently emphasized, and the greatest obstacle has been the conventional doctrine of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva (Mahesvara)—the first being particularized as the Creator, the second as Preserver, and the third as the Destroyer. But outside mythology, i.e. in actual ritual and devotion, these functions have never been distinguished. In recent times the worship of Brahma has been exceptional, perhaps for the reason that, his work having been finished, there was not much occasion to take notice of him. The worship of Vishnu and Siva has continued, but it has nothing to do with their specific aspects as Preserver and Destroyer. They are worshipped as a general supreme God with all the attributes and functions of such a god.

It is in the case of Siva that one can see the best illustration of the fact that no god of the so-called Hindu Trinity is worshipped on account of the function which is doctrinally assigned to him. Siva is a complete supreme god in himself. So the most common names assigned to him were Isvara or Mahesvara (the Lord or the Great Lord).

This aspect of the basic monotheism is illustrated just as strikingly in the cult of the Great Mother Goddess of the Hindus, known under many names, but most commonly as Kali and Durga. In both forms, both in mythology and liturgy, she is the destroyer of the demons (Asuras), and in iconography she is always shown as such, though Kali has a fierce and Durga a benign aspect. But neither mythology, nor liturgy, nor iconography ever made Kali or Durga anything other than a complete God in a feminine form.

Since the cults of these gods will be dealt with in the third part of the book nothing further will be said about them here. The point which has to be made at this stage is that all three are thought of and worshipped exactly as a monotheistic divinity would be, but a Hindu can choose any of these three as his particular monotheistic deity, without denying his allegiance to the two others. At some unknown time these distinct gods of the old

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Hindu polytheism appear to have undergone a process of conceptual syncretism, which made their particularity irrelevant to devotion, without doing away with that in liturgy and iconography. To this monotheism I would give the name of polymorphous monotheism, because in it one God has three forms. To it can be applied the motto *e pluribus unum*, because it has established a unity of the Godhead without destroying the plurality.

The true Hindu polytheism exists below the special kind of monotheism created by this triad. But it is not the polytheism of the *Rig-Veda*. At first sight the old polytheism would appear to have grown enormously, for the 33 gods of the Vedas had increased to the 330 million of the Puranas or Hindu traditions. The reality was, however, the opposite of the appearance. In Vedic times the polytheistic deities occupied the foreground; in later ages, so far as worship was concerned, they receded to the background. By the end of the eighteenth century a large number of them were no longer worshipped, but it is not possible to say when their worship ceased. Those who survived were minor gods and goddesses. Some of them were still functional, but some were only vestigial. The most important of the polytheistic deities who survived were the following three; Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity; Ganesa, the god of worldly and especially commercial success; and Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Certain gods remained locally important, e.g. the war god Kartikeya, who was worshipped in the south and in Ceylon by the Tamils settled there. Hanuman, the monkey god, was important in the Gangetic basin.

Moreover, at the end of the eighteenth century a secondary and crude form of polytheism could be seen practised even by those Hindus who otherwise had a more sophisticated religious life. Again, it is not possible to say when this lower and parallel form of polytheism appeared. Its gods and goddesses may have existed always without being referred to in the older religious texts. This lower polytheism comprised a large variety of gods and goddesses of a utilitarian character, and the more important ones in Bengal were Sashthi, the goddess of childbirth, Manasa, the goddess of snakes, Sitala, the goddess of smallpox, Ghetu, the god of skin diseases. There were gods of this kind all over India, sometimes bearing different names. Nobody thought of denying the power of these gods and goddesses.

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Ideas about After-life

Since death is the pivot round which religious thinking invariably revolves all religions offer a coherent view of human destiny after the cessation of earthly life. The view may change *pari passu* with the development of a religion, as it did, for example, with Judaism, but at every stage there is a coherent view. This is precisely what Hinduism has never offered, and strangely enough the Hindus themselves have never felt its absence. They have been given and have been happy with wholly inconsistent views about what happens after death, and they will express any view which suits them in the context of an argument.

The Hindu rites about the dead, which are obligatory and which every Hindu performs, are based on the most archaic view, that of the Vedic religion. According to it, the departed spirits lived in a shadowy world comparable to the abode of Hades of the Greeks, or that of Pluto of the Romans, and Sheol of the Jews. This was called *Pitri-loka* (world of the ancestors) or the *Preta-loka* (world of the spirits).

Hindu mortuary rites are meant to secure their entry into that world and after that to provide for their sustenance there. They could get no food and drink, which they needed like any mortal, unless their descendants in the world offered them in periodic oblations—called *tarpana* (satisfaction) with balls of flour or gram *(pinda)* and water. So these were offered at certain fixed times. The first rites were performed from ten days to a month after death, according to the caste of the family, and another at the end of a year. These were called *Srāddha* (literally, reverence or *pietas*).

Even after a year all departed ancestors had to be offered food and water at regular intervals, among the very scrupulous every fortnight, and also at every ceremony in the family like a wedding, expiation, etc. In fact, the physical needs of the ancestors could never be overlooked by their living descendants. That was why a male issue was such a vital question for all Hindus, for except in unavoidable circumstances only male descendants could offer oblations. The idea of *pinda-lopa* (cessation of oblations) horrified all Hindus.

This rite has continued down to this day without reference to the doctrine of rebirth or salvation. No Hindu ever considers the question of how an ancestor of his who, after rebirth, is leading a

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mundane life somewhere, could stand in need of food and water from him. In social controversies in the nineteenth century the idea of *Pitri-loka* (the world of the *Manes*) was used as a sanction behind many taboos, and also in favour of child marriage. It was held that unless a girl was married before her first menstruation, the menstrual blood would go into the mouths of the departed ancestors.

But this early concept of after-life remained throughout ritualistic, and never intruded into the living beliefs about the dead. These were the following: (1) the dead if very virtuous obtained *moksha* or salvation, which was liberation from earthly existence and absorption in the Oversoul; (2) they were reborn in the world; (3) they ascended to heaven or descended to hell; (4) they existed as ghosts. Of these, it may be repeated, the notion of salvation was wholly unreal, a matter merely of theorizing. The view of after-life to which the Hindus clung with the greatest fervour was of rebirth in another household.

It is curious that though the Hindus shed their fear of death by implicitly believing that they would all remain in the world they so loved and be united again to those whom they loved, their scriptures did not give that guarantee. These laid down that the actual animal form in which men would be reborn depended on what they had done in one birth. The *Manu Samhita*, the most authoritative book of sacred law of the Hindus, gives a long list of the transmigrations according to the nature of stumbling. According to it, a man could be born again as a rat for stealing grain, and as a partridge for stealing cloth. Distinction is even made for different kinds of cloth: for stealing cotton cloth the thief would become an ordinary or chukar partridge, but for stealing silk he would become a francolin partridge. However, in their actual thinking no Hindu ever took the possibility of becoming anything but a human being seriously.

But another complexity was introduced by the notion of heaven or hell according to merit or demerit. This notion is also very firmly established, and no reconciliation has been sought with the doctrine of rebirth. The Hindu hells are even more elaborately classified and vividly described than the Christian hells, and the Hindu heaven is more like the Islamic paradise than the Christian heaven, for there are in it the Hindu version of the houris.

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Over and above, there is unshaken belief in ghosts. In theory, it is asserted that the ghostly existence is an intermezzo between death and the performance of the *Sradh*, but in actual fact the Hindus believe in the ghostly existence as a permanent state after death for certain persons. There is also a caste system among the ghosts. The ghosts of Brahmins are called *Brahma Daitya*, and are believed to live in the sacred peepul or banyan tree.

There has not been any attempt to reconcile all these notions, and Hindus believe in them all at one time or another according to the mood of the hour.

Diversity of Practice

The religious practices of the Hindus are even more varied than their beliefs. This does not solely mean that there are sects and denominations among them and that their rituals and worship differ. The sects of the Hindus are indeed numerous and new sects have always been springing up. Each sect has its particular practices, but Hindu sectarianism, as will be explained later, is not exclusive. In any case, the speciality of a sect is only a minor addition to the general practices of Hinduism, to which the sects also adhere.

The really bewildering diversity lies in the general practices. They have so many aspects that they give rise to the impression that they belong to many religions. In point of fact, one family or one individual might have observances which are as different from one another as they are from those of Christianity or Islam. Nevertheless, no Hindu is perplexed by this fact, and is not even conscious of the incongruities.

A Hindu's religious life is lived on different planes, and his practices call for different degrees and kinds of participation according to his position in society. In the first place, the practices of the Hindus who remain in the world are generally very different from those who have left the world. Again, among the Hindus in the world, these would differ according to caste, sex, and age. A person who is not twice-born, or is a woman, or a child, has no obligation to perform any rite or worship in any way, except in respect of the dead or for sanctifying marriage and other worldly events.

The obligatory religious duties of the twice-born are limited,

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though usually he takes up of his own will a large number of them, and these latter may be both personal and social. Again, the religious obligations may be discharged, even by a Brahmin, by proxy, i.e. through the agency of a priest who receives a fixed monthly salary or is paid a fee for each occasion. Finally, a large number of religious observances have no devotional character and are only formal rites.

The obligatory rites for the twice-born and especially the Brahmins are those which have come down from the oldest or Vedic stage of the religion, the other features of which have become wholly obsolete. It is compulsory for the Brahmin to perform his three daily rites personally. These are utterances of the famous *mantra* of the *Gayatri* with accompaniments like ablutions, gestures, etc. Now, this *mantra* consists of three lines from the *Rig-Veda* (II. 62. x), namely,

(Om, bhur-bhuvah-svar)
Tat Savitur- varenyam
bhargo-devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt.
(Om.)

This has been variously translated, but its general meaning is clear enough, and is given by Max Müller as follows: 'Let us obtain (or according to Hindu tradition, let us meditate on) the adorable splendour of Savitri (sun); may he arouse our minds.' All the Hindu sacred books of later times proclaim these to be the most holy lines of the Vedas. For example, the *Manu Samhita*, the most authoritative of the books on sacred law *(Dharma Sastra)*, says:

> Prajapati also milked out of the three Vedas the letters *a*, *u*, and *ma*, together with the words *bhuh, bhuvah, svar*. The same supreme Prajapati also milked from each of the three Vedas one of the portions of the text called *savitri*, beginning with the word *tat*. . . . The three great imperishable particles preceded by *Om*, and the *gayatri* of three lines, are to be regarded as the mouth of Brahma.

It is impossible to discover why out of over one thousand hymns and 10,500 verses of the *Rig-Veda* these cryptic lines should have been selected as the supreme credo and prayer for a Brahmin. On the face of it, the *Gayatri* is connected with the worship of the sun, a minor deity in Hinduism, and so far as it can be called a prayer it is only a wish for the mind to be alert. Such an utterance cannot

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be put by the side of the Christian credo or the Lord's Prayer nor by the side of the Islamic confession of faith and the prayer known as *Fatiha*. Yet it has been uttered for thousands of years as the formula on which Hinduism stands, and which no Sudra can utter. When the Brahmin says his *Gayatri* three times a day he does not have the least religious feeling. But it is said with the utmost gravity and reverence, with what in Sanskrit is expressed by the word *sraddhā*. There is also in the attitude and expression of the performer an air of something awe-inspiring and mysterious which forbids any kind of profanity. But the performance, if it had any mental state behind it, had long ago become purely behavioural, a sort of conditioned reflex of the sacred.

With the recital of the *Gayatri* also went a number of household rites, including sacrifices for counteracting the sin of killing insects and other small creatures unknowingly in the course of household work like sweeping and cooking, and also including offerings to gods who were unknown but in widest commonalty spread and had to be placated collectively. Up to recent times even a worldly Hindu's worship and rites might take two or three hours, and he never grudged the trouble, for his worldly welfare depended on them.

After that came a whole series of rituals and worship which were meant for all Hindus irrespective of caste. They were not enjoined as obligatory, but when taken up voluntarily were performed with the same strictness and regularity as was seen in the case of the compulsory duties. These began with a special initiation, which was sought generally by an elderly man or woman. All Hindu families had hereditary Gurus whom they regarded as spiritual teachers. These Gurus visited the houses of their *Yajamanas* (disciples) from time to time, and were received with great honour and pomp. Even if a young son of the Guru came, say a boy of twelve (called *Guru-kumara)*, an old Kayastha gentleman of sixty and his wife would touch his foot and take the dust *(pada-dhuli)* from it on the head. Sometimes they also drank the water in which the Guru dipped his big toe called *Charanamrita* (or nectar from the feet).

These Gurus, if requested, gave a special mantra to the disciple and instructions about his devotions. This was the formal and personal initiation of those who were not twice-born. This worship was not the more or less formal and abstract *tri-sandhya* (three

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repetitions of the *Gayatri*) of the Brahmin, but was directed towards one or other of the principal anthropomorphic gods. The worshipper could choose the god according to his inclination, and the deity could be Krishna (usually Krishna and Radha) of the Vaishnavas, Siva of the Saiva cult, or Durga or Kali of the Sakta cult. This worship did not require an image, but the worshipper had to invoke in his imagination the features of the deity while reciting the standardized description and also chant a hymn. There was no expression of personal devotion in this worship, and thus it resembled the Brahmin's utterance of the *Gayatri* as a formal rite. But with some Hindus this formal worship developed into a devout personal worship with complete emotional involvement. The motives for this were varied. This amplification could develop within the Vaishnava as well as the Sakta cult, and in the latter case, also in its Tantric form.

Another form of personal worship was seen in the *Vratas* or rites performed annually in obedience to a vow. These had an infinite variety, and were taken up by women only. Generally, a woman would perform them regularly for twelve years, at the end of which the vow to perform a *Vrata* would be completed ceremonially with great pomp. This was consolidation of the merit acquired by observing the vow.

These rites virtually comprised and still comprise all the personal and private forms of religious practice of the Hindus. Beyond these lies the immense and not less varied field of collective and public practice. This is the most familiar aspect of Hinduism, for image worship in temples belongs to the public sphere. In it is to be found the full expression of the polytheistic and anthropomorphic side of Hinduism.

But if this practice is called public it is not to be understood that it is publicly organized or owned. There is no such thing as a centralized or hierarchical organization in Hinduism. It is quite spontaneously coherent in practice, and self-driven. Even the old Hindu state or rather the king who embodied the state in one person, never controlled the practice of religion, though the princes both built and endowed the temples; in fact, the great temples of India were almost all built by them. But the endless clusters of temples that were to be seen all over India like parish churches, were built by the landed gentry and also by the merchants.

But the rituals and worship in these temples were public, that

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is to say, anyone could come and witness the rites and bring his offerings. There was a very great variety of shrines and temples. On the lowest plane, was the family shrine. Every well-to-do family had its own household shrine, which was either a small building or a room specially set apart within the mansion. The special family god's image was put in it, and, according to the sect or denomination of the family, it could either be an image of Krishna (invariably with Radha) or less commonly the Mother Goddess. But overwhelmingly the deity was Krishna, irrespective of the family's sectarian affiliation. In the same shrine was placed the material symbol of Vishnu as Narayan, which was the fossil ammonite. The worship of this shell was basic in Hinduism. It had to be placed in its cradle, whenever any religious ceremony was performed.

In addition, the more wealthy families had temples by the side of the family mansion, or in the market or again in the burning ghat. They were devoted either to Siva in the form of *linga* (or phallic symbol) or Kali. Very wealthy families would have as many as twelve Siva temples in a row by the side of a river or tank. There were also independent temples to Krishna, but in Bengal at all events they were not as common as the detached temples to Siva or Kali.

Neither in the family shrines nor in the temples of the family did the owners perform any religious rite. For that salaried priests were always engaged, but the members of the family, usually the womenfolk, at times attended the rites. The great temples, irrespective of who was the patron, were in charge of hereditary families of priests, who were responsible for the service of the gods and appropriated the surplus money. All those who went to the temples left money, in addition to their offerings in kind.

Last of all, it has to be noted that the images are of two kinds, permanent and made *ad hoc*. The permanent ones are placed in the temples, and these are of stone or brass, but also at times of gold or silver. Once established, they remained in place for generations.

But there were other images of clay, made for special occasions. After the days of worship these were normally cast into water, either a river or a large tank. These were the images for the religious festivals all round the year. Certain potters made a special trade of them. The most important festival with the most

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elaborate image was that of Durga in Bengal. For the worship of these images a special hall was set apart in every house that held these festivals. This hall had an open front, with a courtyard in front, where the sacrifice took place and the visitors stood.

In addition to these principal deities, the women had special ones of their own, whose worship took place in the home on certain days of the week. The first in status in this class was the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, worshipped weekly on Thursdays. She had an opposite number, a god who was always malevolent and brought misfortune or ruin on the unwary. His name was Sani (Saturn). He was regularly worshipped on Saturdays to appease his malevolence. Over and above, the women gave special attention to the goddess of births, Sasthi. She was worshipped under a banyan tree.

At first sight such a range of observances, in which all Hindus participated with a catholicity unrestricted by any sectarian affiliation, would seem to be a crushing burden. Yet there was no feeling of being burdened. On the contrary, all the rituals were gone through with strict attention to all the details. In their religious practices the Hindus never showed the casualness which marked their activities in worldly life. Here alone was unfailing alertness and efficiency, and even attention to the aesthetic side of life, so absent in everything else. The Hindus, who never serve food with any aesthetic sensibility at their worldly banquets, arranged the food platter of the gods and goddesses in a manner which was beautiful to see.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage to holy places is not an obligatory duty for a Hindu as the pilgrimage to Mecca is for a Muslim. But in practice the Hindus are more given to going on frequent and long pilgrimages than the followers of other religions. Hindu pilgrimage is the Muslim's *Haj* multiplied a hundredfold.

But this pilgrimage is different from the Muslim pilgrimage. It is different even from that of the Buddhists. The places of pilgrimage of other major religions are connected with their origin and subsequent history. All those spots have personal associations with either the founder or some notable follower. Among the few places which are holy for such a reason among the Hindus, are

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Mathura and Brindaban, which are sacred on account of the connection with Krishna's life. This association is, however, only mythical. Moreover, visits to these two places are not considered as pilgrimages in the strict sense.

The real Hindu pilgrimage is connected with water, especially the river. The Sanskrit word for a place of pilgrimage is *tirtha*, a ford, a bathing place, in its primary meaning. But from very early times, not possible to determine exactly, the word acquired a religious significance, and, in undertaking pilgrimages with a very comprehensive itinerary, even women underwent fatigue and faced dangers, a hundredth part of which no Hindu man will contemplate for any other purpose.

Naturally, among the rivers, the Ganges was the first in holiness, or rather it was the first river to be regarded as holy, and had its sacredness extended to the other rivers of India with the extension of Aryan colonization. The whole course of the river was holy, and in Bengal relatives would carry a body twenty miles to cremate it on the banks of the Ganges. Some spots in its course, however, acquired special importance. These were the following: the traditional source, Gangotri, in the Gahrwal Himalayas; Hardwar where the river entered the plain; Gahr-Mukteswar further down; the great confluence with the Jumna at Allahabad: and Benares.

The other big rivers of northern and southern India—Jumna, Nerbudda, Tapti, Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery—were raised to a sacred status in course of time, and in different ways. They constituted, so to say, a pantheon of rivers.

In contrast, the sea provided only four notable places of pilgrimage. These were Puri on the Bay of Bengal in Orissa, Rameshwaram on the Indian side of the Palk Straits, Kanyakumari at the extreme tip of south India, and Dwarka on the Arabian Sea at the extreme end of the Kathiawar peninsula. But these places were sacred, not on account of the sea, but for their association with the myths and cults of Rama and Krishna. India has very few lakes. But Lake Pushkar near Ajmer is specially holy, and Manas Sarovar in Tibet also has that status.

All these spots occupied a very important place in the Hindu religious consciousness. They are praised in all the literatures of India in all languages, whether religious or secular. An example might be given from a collection of folk tales—*Vikrama's Adven-*

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tures or the *Thirty-two Tales of the Throne*. In one of the stories in it is to be found the following eulogy:

> There is no greater purification than bathing in a sacred place. When a man does not get salvation by asceticism, celibacy, sacrifices, nor indeed by charity, he will obtain it by worshipping the Ganges. Those who, being able, do not see the Ganges, the destroyer of sin, are like people born blind, and they are comparable to cattle and beasts.

Many of the places of pilgrimage on the great rivers also had temples of one or other of the great deities, often Siva or Vishnu (or in the alternative form of Krishna), but also of the Mother Goddess under her various names. This is specially true of Benares. Even when people go there only to bathe in the Ganges on specially holy days, they do not omit to worship at the temple of Siva, who is known as Visvanath, or Lord of the Universe.

It is certain, however, that the places of pilgrimage got their sacred status at first as bathing places only, and the gods were installed there when image worship and temple cults were introduced to give them additional prestige. However, there are certain places not on any important river which became sacred for the temples alone and their particular gods, e.g. Conjevram, Tanjore, and Madura in the south. But these acquired their status late. In northern India no place of pilgrimage stands anywhere except on a river.

Why the rivers were given a sacred status and why certain spots on them became specially holy cannot be explained. There are, of course, stories in Hindu mythology to account for it. For instance, the sacredness of the Ganges has been explained by the legend that it was a heavenly river which was brought down to earth to resurrect the sons of Sagar who had been burnt to ashes by the wrath of a sage, and also that she was received, upon her falling on earth, on the head of Siva. But such stories must have been invented after the river had been regarded as holy for a long time.[1]

As to the spots, some had mythological associations, and some became sacred after being made the seat of a great deity by a king or queen in a political capital. In regard to Benares, I am inclined

[1] For a personal, and perhaps over-imaginative explanation of the sacred status given to the great rivers of India, see my *Continent of Circe* (1965), pp. 161–8.

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to think that its sacred status for the Hindus is an inheritance from Buddhism. A spot near the present site of Benares was where Buddha first preached his religion, and it is still a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists. The Hindus may have appropriated this sacred status for their own religion.

Hindu Festivals and Fairs

The cycle of Hindu festivals belongs to the same category of celebrations as those of the Greeks and Romans. As they have existed in India for many centuries they are special occasions of worship supplementary to the regular daily worship, but far surpassing them in pomp and splendour. These two bear the same relation to each other as the daily meals do to the special banquets in Hindu households.

The festivals are arranged round the year, and the actual dates seem to have been fixed for varied reasons. Some of them are connected with the seasons. For instance, the most tumultuous of the festivals, the Holi, was certainly a spring festival to begin with. It soon became a Saturnalia with a good deal of sensuality and even obscenity marking its celebration. It became identified with or was by itself a festival of the god of love. Now it is associated with Krishna and his sports with the Gopis or milkmaids. The worship of the Ganges in June is intended to celebrate the onset of the rainy season. Another very important seasonal festival is the Dussera in autumn. It marked the commencement of military campaigns after the cessation of rains. It retains that character in northern India, though in Bengal it is associated with the Mother Goddess Durga. But in this festival she is herself a goddess of war.

Lastly, some festivals, especially those of bathing ceremonially in the great rivers are connected with the conjunction of stars and planets, and other astronomical phenomena like eclipses. Some of these conjunctions are regarded as especially holy.

It is impossible to give a description of the festivals. They are so many and so varied that a book could be written about them alone. A brief enumeration would become only a list, which will convey nothing of the spirit of these occasions. Something will be said later about the joy they bring to Hindu life.

The fairs are the economic complements to the festivals, which enable merchants to sell their goods and give those who come to

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them the pleasure of being in a crowd. So they always had and have not only temporary shops and stalls, but also all kinds of amusements. I saw the circus for the first time in my life in the fair for the swinging festival of Krishna in my birthplace. To extend the amusement, they were even very considerately provided with brothels. Some fairs were held for special merchandise. For instance, at the junction of the Ganges and the Sone near Patna a great fair is held for the sale of cattle, horses, camels, and elephants. In my home town in East Bengal, hundreds of miles away, I have seen horses bought at this fair. The fairs are, however, too numerous to be mentioned individually.

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Chapter Four

PRIESTHOOD AND SECTS

IN Hindu society the Brahmin caste is theoretically the priestly order. But in practice the caste and the profession are not to be treated as one. All Brahmins need not be priests. In fact, a majority of them are not. They can follow any profession or means of livelihood, and have been kings, soldiers, shopkeepers, or peasants. Brahmins who are wealthy or hold good social positions do not perform the religious ceremonies even in their own homes. On the other hand, no one except a Brahmin can be a priest. Thus, in respect of priesthood, the caste system is permissive in giving the Brahmins the freedom not to adopt the priestly vocation, but restrictive in not allowing anyone but a Brahmin to become a priest.

But the Brahmin priests do not have full freedom to perform religious rites for all castes. In some past time the performance of these in the house of a Sudra was considered degrading. But this prejudice disappeared long ago. Nevertheless, the castes which were considered untouchable, i.e. from whom water could not be accepted, were avoided by good Brahmins. But for the sake of money some Brahmins performed religious rites in their houses, and were put in a special category of the caste. On the other hand, many low-caste people made their own Brahmins. It also seems probable that in the past the priests of many of the invading foreign tribes became Brahmins when these were absorbed into the Hindu society. In recent times no distinction has been made between Brahmin and Brahmin, and all of them can perform religious rites somewhere or other.

Priesthood as a Profession

Priesthood was and is a profession among the Hindus, and perhaps it was and is the profession with the largest number of practitioners. But there were and are distinctions of status within the profession. At the top were the spiritual directors, teachers of Hindu philosophy, and consultants on points of sacred law, who

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also at times performed or at least supervised the important religious rites in the houses of their clients. After them came those who performed the seasonal worship for fees which were more or less standardized. If the first class were consultants, these priests could be described on the analogy of the medical profession as the general practitioners. Lowest in the hierarchy were the salaried priests who performed the daily rites in the houses of the wealthy. These were regarded as superior members of the domestic staff.

But Brahmins could also make a living by giving expositions of mythology or reciting both the religious texts and the epics, combining that with their comments. Some of these men acquired a great reputation as reciters or expositors and were specially invited to the houses of the wealthy to preach on ceremonial occasions.

Another source of income for the priests who were learned in philosophy and logic was provided by the custom of inviting them to hold debates and discussions for the edification of the public. At the funeral ceremonies these discussions were as much expected as were music and dance in other ceremonies. These pundits received large fees and presents on these occasions, and when the patrons were wealthy the presents included silver vessels of all kinds.

The learned men had a dais covered with a clean white sheet, on which they squatted and held debates on points of logic and philosophy. There were neither fixed times nor regular audiences for them. The pundits talked when they felt like it, or simply looked on, taking snuff all the time. The members of the house or the guests came in, stayed, and went out as they pleased like the members of the House of Commons. The arguments at times became acrimonious. Very few listeners could understand the points made by the debaters, but, as they often lost their temper, the exhibition was relished by all.

These exhibitions of learning were regarded as adjuncts of wealth and position, and no great landowner would pass over the pundits any more than they would other kinds of professional entertainers. The listeners to the debates, too, would not look upon the disputes as anything but entertainment, because unless they were pundits themselves, they could not understand the extremely recondite and technical points raised, whereas their loss of temper would be obvious and enjoyable.

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To give an illustration of the spirit in which these debates were carried on I would quote from a Bengali novel—*Alaler Gharer Dulal* by Pyari Chand Mitra—published in the middle of the nineteenth century, which described them as they were.

> The professors are taking snuff and discussing the *shastras* [the sacred books] among themselves. But their nature is such that if they get together, it becomes difficult for them to talk coolly. One kind of row or other is bound to arise as a matter of course . . . Such a discussion being on, it seemed blows would soon follow back-talk. Uncle Thug [the Muslim bailiff of the estate] thought it would be better to stop the trouble in time, and walked up warily to the learned men and said: 'I say, sirs, why are you fighting over the question of a jug and a lamp? I'll give you two jugs.' [This was the imagery in a quibble of Hindu logic.]
>
> There was a *smarta* Brahmin [expert on sacred law] among the pundits, who got up and shouted: 'Who is this fellow? Why does a Yavana [Muslim] poke his nose into the *sradh* of a Hindu? Is he the will-o'-the-wisp manager at the funeral of a ghoul?'
>
> Then the abuse turned into fisticuffs, and pushing and cuffing into cudgelling. The master of the house came running and cried out: 'If you spoil the *sradh* I shall lodge a suit for damages at the High Court.'

This was, of course, satire, but no more than a permissible caricature of a reality known to all. One wrong idea has to be given up in considering the standing of Hindu philosophy, and it is that Hindus in recent centuries have had any respect for philosophy and philosophers. The high standing of Hindu philosophy was inculcated upon modern Hindus by European and more particularly German scholars, of whom Max Müller was the most eminent and influential.

The professional priests always had a working knowledge of Sanskrit, and at times were familiar with the Sastras or sacred literature in their way. But what they always had to acquire was a thorough knowledge of the liturgy of worship of all the different gods and goddesses as well as for the rites connected with daily life. In addition, they also had to possess some knowledge of Hindu astrology. All this they learned in their family and never by formal study.

The rites were elaborate, and the incantations long. But it was not necessary to memorize them. The priests always took with

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them the appropriate text for each ceremony, and it was not considered improper to keep the books open before them while performing the rites, or to pause to consult them. It was considered absolutely essential, however, that the words should be uttered correctly and the gestures be appropriate. If a mistake was made in reciting the incantations it was not enough to repeat the mispronounced word correctly; the whole incantation had to be recited from the beginning or its efficacy would be lost.

In any case, the old ladies of the family saw to it that the priest committed no mistake. Seeing the rites performed year after year, they became so familiar with the procedures that no lapse could escape their eye. They corrected the priests severely, and if the latter wanted to keep their jobs they had also to retain the good opinion of the matrons, who never spoilt the priests as they did their grandchildren. The boys of priestly families learned the liturgies from childhood by watching their elders, and also served as understudies if for any reason these elders were unable to go to the houses of their clients *(Yajamanas)*.

The priests had no responsibility whatever for the spiritual or moral welfare of those for whom they performed the rites. The concept of a cure of souls was wholly unknown to Hinduism. Nor did the priests exercise any philanthropic role such as the care of the poor, the destitute, or the sick.

On the contrary, the priests themselves were dependent on what might be regarded as unorganized social service. But neither the givers nor the receivers ever regarded the money and goods given to the priests as charity, for the relations between the two were like the relations between any non-professional member of a society and persons exercising a special function, such as lawyers, doctors, business agents, mechanics, etc. The priests were in charge of the household's relations with its gods because the members of the family could not manage them on account of their extremely technical character. The money earned by the priests was not very large individually, but it was large in its total distribution, so that if it could not be classed as professional income it had to be regarded as social dole.

If the gifts did not seem good enough to the priests, they grumbled and spread stories of the miserliness of the particular householder. Since all Hindus are in abject fear of the unfavourable opinions of their neighbours and relatives, the priests had adequate

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sanctions behind their demands or expectations in their tongues. Priests with a higher standing, e.g. the Gurus, collected their dues almost like the feared tax-collectors of the Muslim state. Abbé Dubois gave the following account of their method of collecting money from his experience in south India. He wrote:

> From time to time *gurus* make tours of inspection in those districts where their followers are most numerous. They sometimes go as much as a hundred miles from their habitual residence. The chief, if not the only, object of this expedition is to collect money . . . they are merciless in extorting tribute money from their followers, which often greatly exceeds their means. They call this method of obtaining money *dakshina* and *pada-kanikai*, and no one, however poor he may be, is exempt from paying it. There is no insult or indignity that *gurus* will not inflict upon any one who either cannot or will not submit to this tax. Deaf to all entreaties, they cause the defaulter to appear before them in an ignominious and humiliating attitude, publicly overwhelm him with insults and reproaches, and order that mud or cow-dung shall be thrown in his face. If these means do not succeed, they force him to give up one of his children, who is obliged to work without wages until the tribute money is paid. Indeed they have been known to take away a man's wife as compensation. Finally, as a last and infallible resource, they threaten him with their malediction.

There is no reason whatever to doubt the statements of Dubois. In south India the Brahmins generally were much more arrogant and assertive than in the north, because they were the highest caste of the colonial Aryans. The fierce anti-Brahmin movement in the south of today is the natural reaction to the old Brahmin domination.

One particular claim which the priests, and in fact even lay Brahmins, had on Hindu society at large was to be fed sumptuously on every ceremonial occasion. *Brahmana-Bhojana* or feeding Brahmins was a socio-spiritual obligation; so wealthy families had standing arrangements for feeding a fixed number of Brahmins on certain auspicious occasions as well as at the festivals. In the early part of the nineteenth century a wealthy man of Calcutta left a large sum of money with the British authorities to feed a minimum number of Brahmins regularly out of the proceeds of this fund. After some years the number of persons who came to eat fell off, and the money was utilized for other charities.

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All over Bengal there was a class of Brahmins who roamed over many adjoining districts in order to eat at all the banquets given in the area in connection with various rites, especially funerals. As these feasts went on from before noon to dusk and everybody who came was fed without question of invitation, these Brahmins and also ordinary people, who were always half-starved, returned at times to eat again. In my young days, when the expense of the ceremonies had begun to pinch, this lavish hospitality of old times was felt to be a nuisance. So precautions were taken to prevent double-feasting. At the funeral of a very wealthy relative of mine at the beginning of this century, a very bureaucratic expedient was adopted to prevent repeated eating by the same person, which was to stamp the palm of a person who had eaten once with indelible ink. One of my brothers, who was present on this occasion, assisted at this procedure with great glee. Finally, it was normal to ask again and again for a particular dish or dishes, especially sweetmeats, and then tie up the leftovers in a towel and take them home for the wife and children.

Not only were the priests not expected to be the guardians of morality, they did not have a high reputation for virtue. The officiating priests in the houses of the wealthy, who were regarded as domestics, were not expected to have any traits of character different from those of the other servants. The priests were not celibate. Indeed, they had a bad reputation generally as to their sexual morals. In Bengal the lower ranks of the performing priests were supposed to have liaisons with the maidservants, and sometimes even with the matrons or widows of the family. This was also the case more or less all over India.

The bad reputation extended to the whole of the Brahmin order, even when they were not priests. After the establishment of British rule the Brahmins went into the professions and the civil service, and thereby not only acquired great respect for their intelligence and competence, but also became a very important class socially and economically. In south India they became the most influential caste.

But before that, and in south India more especially, and also when they were in the priesthood, they had a very low reputation for morals. The Abbé Dubois, who had mixed with them freely, set down his view of them as they were at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

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But are the Brahmins, who are so easily shocked at the sins and vices of others—are they themselves exempt from all human weaknesses? Are their morals irreproachable? Oh, far from it! My pen would refuse to describe all their wrong-doings; . . . I think that we may take as their greatest vices the untrustworthiness, deceit, and double-dealing . . . It is quite impossible to fathom their minds and discover what they really mean; more impossible, indeed, than with any other race. He would indeed be a fool who relied on their promises, protestations, or oaths, if it were to their interest to break them.

Dubois went on to say:

Intense selfishness is also a common characteristic of a Brahmin. Brought up in the idea that nothing is too good for him, and that he owes nothing in return to any one, he models the whole of his life on this principle. He would unhesitatingly sacrifice the public good, or his country itself, if it promoted his own welfare.

The Brahmin, Dubois also points out, has an overweening sense of self-importance and therefore arrogance. 'He makes it a point of duty not only to hold himself aloof from all other human beings, but also to despise and hate from the bottom of his heart everyone who happens not to be born of the same caste as himself.' Further, the Brahmin thinks himself absolved from any feelings of gratitude, pity, or consideration towards them.

Another failing of the Brahmin was his gluttony. Dubois writes that at the feasts some Brahmins eat so much that they are unable to rise from their squatting position after the meal.[1] Last of all, Dubois singles out the sensuality of the Brahmins. It seemed to him as if most of the religious institutions of the Hindus were designed for the purpose of rousing sexual passions, and he mentions the mythological stories which describe the licentious orgies of the gods, the erotic sculpture on the temples, and dancers and prostitutes attached to the temples. He further refers to the erotic treatises which they possessed and read.

As to practice, Dubois says, so long as irregular sexual relations

[1] In my boyhood I heard many satirical stories about this Brahmin failing. One of them was this. A Brahmin had been to a feast and eaten so much that he could not walk back to his village. But as it was on the bank of the same river on which the house of his host stood, he was just put into the stream to be carried back home. While floating down, he collided against the carcass of a dead cow. Stroking it with an outstretched arm, the Brahmin exclaimed, 'Were you too at the feast?'

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are kept secret they are thought to be of very small importance. He points out that the presence of young widows is a temptation to debauchery and seduction. As he puts it:

> Look at the crowds of widows in the prime of life who are forbidden to remarry, and who are only too ready to yield to the temptations by which they are assailed. Modesty and virtue place no restrictions on them; their only fear is that their misconduct may be found out. Consequently, abortion is their invariable resource to prevent such a contingency, and they practise it without the slightest scruple or remorse. There is not a woman amongst them who does not know how to bring it about. This odious crime, so revolting to all natural feelings, is of no importance in the eyes of the Hindus.

H. K. Beauchamp, who translated and edited Dubois' final French text and published it for the first time with his annotations in 1897, and who also had first-hand knowledge of social conditions in the province of Madras, made the observation: 'It must be admitted that the Abbé paints the Brahmins in darker colours than, as a body, they deserve.' But Beauchamp overlooked the unquestionable fact that one hundred years of Western education and familiarity with Western moral principles had brought about a revolutionary change among the Brahmins as among all other social classes in India. Where these influences had not penetrated the vices and failings noted by Dubois were to be found among the Brahmins to a greater or lesser degree all over India. It must not be forgotten that the Brahmins were the highest caste in India and that by the end of the eighteenth century they exhibited, as a class, both the fossilization and the degeneracy of a privileged order.

Sects in Hinduism and their Character

It is not only impossible to enumerate all the sects that have existed in Hindu society, it is not easy even to define what precisely a sect is in Hinduism. Horace Hayman Wilson, who gave the most reliable and exhaustive information about the Hindu sects in English in the volumes of the *Asiatic Researches* in 1828 and 1832, had to say that the description he offered was necessarily superficial. He added that he had got most of his information from two works written, strangely enough, in the Persian language, though by two Hindus, and from another work in a very

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difficult dialect of Hindi. But he was also able to supplement these accounts from his own observation and from oral reports given to him.

There was one place in India where almost all the Hindu sects could be observed. It was Benares, the holiest of all places of pilgrimage of the Hindus, which for that very reason was also the resort of all the religious vagabonds of India. Wilson quoted a Sanskrit couplet on this, and the following is an English translation:

> For those who are ignorant of the revealed scriptures and the sacred traditions, who have abandoned purity and proper conduct, and for those who have nowhere else to go, for them Benares is the refuge.[1]

On the strength of his sources of information, Wilson adopted the traditional classification of the Hindu sects into three large groups, viz., the worshippers of Vishnu (the Vaishnavas), the worshippers of Siva (the Saivas), and the worshippers of the Mother Goddess (the Saktas). But he also found that the subject was much more complex than this broad classification would suggest, and he thought it necessary to set down some reservations:

> The worshippers of Vishnu, Siva, and Sakti, who are the objects of the following description, are not to be confounded with the orthodox adorers of those divinities: few Brahmins of learning, if they have any religion at all, will acknowledge themselves to belong to any of the popular divisions of the Hindu faith, although as a matter of simple preference, they more especially worship some individual deity, as their chosen or *Ishta Devata*: they refer also to the *Vedas*, the books of law, and *Tantras*, as the only rituals they recognize, and regard all practices not derived from those sources as irregular and profane: on the other hand, many sects seem to have originated, in a great measure, out of opposition to the Brahminical order: teachers and disciples are chosen from any class, and the distinction of caste is, in a great measure, sunk in the new one, of similarity of schism: the ascetics and mendicants, also in many instances, affect to treat the Brahmins with particular contempt, and this is generally repaid with interest by the Brahmins.

[1] Śruti-smriti-vihīnānāṃ, ye śauchāchāra-vivarjitāḥ,
Yeṣām kvāpi gatirnasti, tesām Vārānasi gatiḥ.

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This would seem to take the sects of the Hindus out of the folds of true Hinduism, and indeed Wilson introduces his list of sects with the following words: 'Excluding, therefore, those who may be regarded as the regular worshipper of regular gods, we have the following enumeration of the several species of each class.'

From one point of view this would be correct, from another not. Wilson himself said that a portion of the populace was still attached to orthodox Brahmanic Hinduism and also paid deference to the Brahmins. The true character of the sectarian differences, which are not all of the same kind, can be fully understood only in the light of their history and by bearing in mind that they were created by three parallel lines of development.

There was, first, the general evolution of the religion by means of which all Hindu beliefs and practices became separated and reduced to three major cults, i.e. those of Vishnu, Siva, and Sakti. So all the sects of orthodox Brahmanism remained affiliated to these cults.

Secondly, special sects were created by the religious innovators, reformers, and popular prophets. These may be called the dissident or non-conformist sects of Hinduism.

Lastly, the sects were also related to the position of a group of people in Hindu society. So, many sects can be classified according to their social affiliations or disaffiliations. The broadest distinction among the sects is that which is seen between the laity, i.e. the Hindus who are in the world, and the ascetics, hermits, mendicants,—i.e. all those who have renounced the world. The sects of the latter are like the monastic orders in Europe, but their members do not have fixed habitations. These sects or orders are either Vaishnava or Saiva.

The sects of the Hindus who have remained in the world have a close connection with the caste system: there are, first, the sects of the upper castes, which are affiliated with the orthodox cults of Vishnu, Siva, or Sakti; in an altogether different category are the sects of the populace, the merchants, peasants, artisans, and the servile classes, both touchable and untouchable. The sects of this second genus are the most specialized, and their connection with Brahmanic Hinduism is both loose and vague.

Before going on to consider the particular sects it is necessary to form a clear idea of the degree of mutual tolerance or intolerance between the sects. In this respect theory, practice, and

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opinions differed widely. If the sectarian devotional books are referred to, there will be found in them denunciation of other sects by the preachers of a particular sect, and also eulogies of the sect. There are even disparaging comparisons between the main deities like Siva or Vishnu. On the other hand, an equal number of passages will be found which proclaim the validity of each sect for its worshippers, and dwell, on the greatness of all the gods, and even speak of their oneness. In their opinions on religious matters, the Hindus are very catholic and they readily assert that there should be no discrimination between the gods or between their worshippers.

I shall illustrate the overlapping and tolerance between the sects by taking the sectarian differences in Bengal, of which naturally I have more knowledge than about the other regions of India. Here all the upper castes belong formally either to the Vaishnava or the Sakta cult, and an overwhelming majority adhere to the latter. The Saiva sect is virtually absent among the laity. The worship of Vishnu in the form of Krishna (taken with Radha) and that of Durga or Kali have strong sectarian affiliations and there is also a pronounced affectation of antagonism between the two. This corresponds to social stratification: the Saktas are overwhelmingly of the landed gentry, while the Vaishnavas are to be found mainly in the mercantile classes. Since in Bengal the former are definitely the superior social order, they air a good deal of contempt for the Vaishnavas, and make fun of them. The extravagant emotionalism of the Vaishnavas is derided and their devotion to non-violence and their profession of love for all living creatures are dismissed as hypocritical. For example, the Vaishnava formula in Bengali—*Namé ruchi, jivé daya* (taste for the Name, and compassion for animals)—is inverted into—*Jivé ruchi* (taste for animals) and *namé daya* (compassion for the Name.) In Bengal the meat normally eaten is that of the he-goat, and so the Vaishnavas were regarded as the Yama (god of death) of tender kids.

But this chaffing would give a wholly wrong idea of what sectarian loyalty and conduct really are. Even in families which were for generations Sakta, the deity in the family's shrine could be and would be Krishna and Radha. For instance, my family was traditionally Sakta, even aggressively so. Thus an uncle who towards the end of the last century showed leanings towards the

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monotheism of the Brahmos was brought home from college and bathed in the blood of the buffalo sacrificed before the goddess Durga—and, in fact, he was effectively cured of monotheism by that purification. Nevertheless, our family deities were Krishna and Radha united in a close embrace. Each family gave a particular name to Krishna and Radha, and our couple was called Gopinath (Lord of the Milkmaid) and Gopiniji (Lady Milkmaid).

To illustrate the eclecticism further I might say that in addition to one temple in ruins, our family had another temple, not within the boundaries of the homestead, but a little distance away, by the side of a tank—a brick-built temple—in which there was the usual *linga* of Siva, which was worshipped with proper rituals every day. Every house would also have in addition the Salagram Sila, the fossil ammonite, which was the symbol of Vishnu. In fact, this was the most venerated and sacred religious object in the house. To make matters more complex, any member of a house could have a special initiation into a cult and adopt this particular mode of devotion.

Among the ascetics and the lower castes, the sectarian adherence was more strict. The wandering sadhus always followed the rules of their orders, and could be distinguished by their marks, clothes or absence of clothes, and the sticks or tongs or brass vessels they carried. At the great festivals of bathing, e.g. Kumbha Mela, the orders at times quarrelled and even fought for precedence. But as a rule they exhibited a wide tolerance of each other like the many species of wild animals in a forest.

The popular sects were the most exclusive in regard to religious observances, but they were in no way aggressive to others. When these were sects created by the popular prophets their adherents were normally indifferent to the higher Hindu rites, and worshipped in their own way. This did not, however, exclude going to the temples if they wished to do so.

The Vaishnava Sects

In describing some of the principal sects the sectarian adherence of the general body of lay Hindus will be ignored, and only those sects will be described which have a specialized character, either lay or coenobitic. Even their number is large, and each important

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sect has given rise to sub-sects whose affiliation to the parent sect is at times very exiguous. The description is intended to be an illustration of the permissiveness of Hinduism considered as a catholic religious system, so that the doctrines and practices of these sects might be regarded as variations on the normal themes of Hinduism in very distant keys.

In offering this description I shall depend mainly on Wilson because his account was based on his knowledge and observation of the sects when they had not come under the extraneous influences emanating from British rule.

In his essay Wilson gave the following list of the Vaishnava sects: (1) Sri Sampradaya or the followers of Ramanuja; (2) Ramanandis; (3) Kabir Panthis; (4) Maluk Dasis; (5) Khakis; (6) Dadu Panthis; (7) Raya Dasis; (8) Senais Panthis; (9) Vallabhacharya Sampradaya; (10) Mira Bais; (11) Madhvacharis; (12) Nimavats; (13) The Vaishnavas of Bengal or the followers of Chaitanya; (14) Radha Vallabhis; (15) The Sakhi Bhavas; (16) Charan Dasis; (17) Harischandis; (18) Sadhna Panthis; (19) Madhvis; (20) Sannyasis, Vairagis, and Nagas.

Though all these sects are worshippers of Vishnu in one form or another they are not all of one kind. For instance, the followers of Ramanuja, Madhva, or Chaitanya fall within the fold of orthodox Brahmanism, whereas the followers of Kabir or Dadu are definitely dissident. Again, the doctrines or dogmas of certain of the Brahmanical sects, e.g. the Ramanuja sect, or the Madhva sect, or the Chaitanya sect are more philosophical than religious. But the devotions and observances of some of these are on the religious plane. The sects created by the popular prophets are not concerned deeply or at all with dogmatic or metaphysical positions, they offer a particular path of devotion together with simple moral teaching.

It has also to be pointed out that the worship of Vishnu as Vishnu is exceptional in the Vaishnava sects. Most of them worship Krishna either singly or in combination with Radha, but Vishnu is also worshipped in the form of Rama, the seventh incarnation.

Followers of Ramanuja. This selective list of the Vaishnava sects should begin with the one founded by Ramanuja, the great south Indian teacher of philosophy and religion who lived in the twelfth

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century, because it was the oldest among those which existed at the end of the eighteenth century. The members of this sect are mostly to be found in the south. The Ramanujites worshipped Vishnu in his own form together with his consort Lakshmi, as well as the two incarnations of Rama and Krishna. The tenets of the sect were philosophical rather than religious, and are to be found in the commentaries of the founder on the original *Sutra* of the Vedanta, on the *Gita*, and certain other texts. In philosophical terms these are described as *Visishta-advaita* or 'particularized monism'. That is to say, Ramanuja taught that the Supreme Spirit could have attributes.

What made his followers a sect was not this doctrine, but their special rule of life, and externally, too, they were recognized by distinguishing marks. Their daily life was very strictly regulated and the strictest rules were about eating. They had to cook their own food, and eat it in great privacy. If anybody saw them eating the food had to be thrown away at once and buried in the ground. Also, they could not eat in cotton garments, but had to wear those made of silk or wool.

Their distinguishing marks were not only elaborate, but the main substance for making them had to be procured with great care. This was a white calcareous clay, which had to be of the greatest purity like the clay for the best china. The purest came from Dwaraka, a place of pilgrimage on the coast of the Kathiawar peninsula, from a well in which the *gopis* or milkmaids who loved Krishna were believed to have drowned themselves after his death. This clay was called *gopi-chandana* (sandal paste of the gopis). The most important mark made with this white clay was on the forehead, where two perpendicular lines were drawn from the root of the hair above the forehead to the inner ends of the eyebrows below, and connected by a transverse line at the bottom. Between these two lines there had to be a red line made with a mixture of turmeric and lime. The marks on the arms and chest were, however, made only with the white clay. These gave them a spotted appearance, and the marks were supposed to be the four objects which Vishnu held in his four hands and by which he was distinguished. These were the conch shell, wheel, mace, and lotus. Those who wanted verisimilitude in the emblems had stamps of these objects made of wood and then had themselves stamped with the clay. Though this was condemned formally,

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some even stamped these emblems on their body with a red-hot iron.

Their religious observance was five-fold: cleaning and purifying temples, images, etc.; providing flowers and perfumes for religious rites; presentation of such offerings; counting the rosary and repeating the name; and, lastly, meditation to unite with the deity. The reward of these observances was elevation toVaikuntha or Vishnu's heavenly abode.

Followers of Ramananda. The founder of this sect was Ramananda, traditionally associated with Ramanuja, as a direct disciple or in apostolic succession. His date is uncertain, but most probably he preached in the fifteenth century. He was a north Indian and taught at Benares. The followers of this sect are to be found mainly in the Gangetic plain. Ramananda's teaching was devotional, and the devotion was directed towards Rama, as the incarnation of Vishnu, and as the manifested God. It is only in the Gangetic plain that Rama is regarded as God. It may be mentioned incidentally that Mahatma Gandhi, when shot, died with the words 'Ram, Ram' on his lips. The name of Rama is also uttered to drive off evil spirits, and in northern India a dead body is taken to the burning ghat to the accompaniment of the cry *Ram nam satya hai* ('The name of Ram is true'). But though he has become an object of devotion there is no cult associated with Rama nor temples to him. The picture of Rama accompanied by his wife Sita, both shown seated like a king and a queen, and attended by Rama's brother Lakshmana as well as the holy langur Hanuman in a prostrate posture, is a sacred emblem. The most fervent expression of the devotion to Rama as God is to be found in the life of Rama written by the great Hindi poet Tulsidas.

The Ramanandis or Ramavats, as the members of this sect were called, were the opposite of the Ramanujites in respect of rules of conduct. They had no rule of life, and even deprecated caste distinctions. Among the disciples of Ramananda were men of even untouchable castes and one who was probably a Muslim.

Followers of Kabir. With this sect Hindu sectarian evolution branched off into what might be called a foreign epiphytic growth, and the affiliation with Hindu religiosity is very exiguous. One of the twelve disciples of Ramananda was Kabir, generally

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accepted to have been a Muslim. But he became the most famous of the people's prophets of northern India. His life and deeds are embodied in many legends, and he is even supposed to have lived for 120 years. The date of his death is, however, known with relative certainty to have been 1518.

Though he and his sect are included among the Vaishnavites, the connection is nominal, and his religious teaching is very general and eclectic. Its doctrinal side is obscure, and it is also very heterodox. It most strikingly illustrates the almost unlimited scope given to religious teachers in India to become non-conformist. Kabir denounced both Hindu and Muslim formalism with equal severity, and proclaimed his contempt for the Hindu priest and the Muslim mulla alike. His doctrine was one of simple and straightforward personal surrender to God, irrespective of any particular name, and his moral teaching, though very fervent, was of a very simple kind. He characterized his teaching as *Sahaja Yoga*, or 'easy union' or 'easy discipline'. He rejected idolatry and rituals, and said that those who sought God should flee from temple and mosque and try to find him in the fields, in the artisan's workshop, and the happy household. Not surprisingly, he rejected the caste system.

A few of Kabir's sayings might be quoted in order to illustrate his conception of his own prophetic role as well as the complexion of his religious message. About himself he said: 'My word is of the word; hear it, go not astray; if man wishes to know the truth, let him investigate the word . . . My word is from the first; meditate on it every moment; you will flourish in the end like the Jowar plant, which externally shows but beards and leaves . . . Without hearing the word, it is utter darkness; say, whither shall one go; without finding the gateway of the word, man will ever be astray.' But he seems also to have his doubts. One saying has this: 'I have wept for mankind, but no one has wept with me; *he* will join in my tears, who comprehends the word. All have exclaimed, master, master, but to me this doubt arises: how can they sit down with the master, whom they do not know.'

Kabir did indeed propound a doctrine, but it was nothing else than a very simple form of the amorphous Hindu catholicity. The real strength of his teaching lay in its emphasis on sincere faith in God and devotion to him, and equally in his simple moral teaching. One typical pronouncement might be quoted:

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To Ali and Rama we owe our existence, and should, therefore, show similar tenderness to all that live: of what avail is it to shave your head, prostrate yourself on the ground, or immerse your body in the stream; whilst you shed blood you call yourself pure, and boast of virtues that you never display; of what benefit is cleaning your mouth, counting your beads, performing ablutions and bowing in temples, when, whilst you mutter your prayers, or journey to Mecca and Medina, deceitfulness is in your heart . . . If God dwells in tabernacles, whose residence is the universe? . . . Behold but one in all things, it is the second that leads you astray. Every man and woman that has been born is of the same nature as yourself. He, whose is the world, and whose are the children of Ali and Rama, He is my Guru, He is my Pir.

Basically, Kabir wanted to make men religious by lessening the burden of religion—an aim all popular religious prophets have had in India.

Followers of Vallabhacharya. The aim of lessening the burden of strict Brahmanism was realized within the orthodox Hindu framework, though in different ways, by the two Vishnuite sects to be described next. These were also the most important and influential Vaishnava sects in northern India at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and both had a large following in their respective regions. One of the sects obeyed the teaching of Vallabhacharya and the other of Chaitanya. The followers of the former were to be found mostly in western India, and of the latter in Bengal. However, on account of the mythological association of Krishna with Mathura and Brindaban, the formal centres of both the sects were in Brindaban.

To begin with the Vallabhacharya sect. It was founded by a teacher named Vallabha, about whom many miraculous tales are current. It is, however, a fact that he was a Telugu Brahmin and taught during the first decades of the sixteenth century. According to tradition, he left behind him eighty-four disciples who were commissioned to preach his message in different regions. But his real successor was his son, and the leadership of his sect became dynastic and apostolic at the same time. This son's many sons succeeded to and divided up the leadership and established branches in different cities. These leaders were all called Maharajas (Great Kings) like secular rulers. They were actually like very

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wealthy landlords, and had immense wealth. They did not live an ascetic life, and not even a simple one dedicated to religion in the Western sense.

The life of the heads of the sect as well as of its members was based on one part of the original teaching of Vallabhacharya. He preached that in order to worship God a man did not have to turn his back on the world, fast, practise self-mortification, or abstain from good living. He taught positively that satisfaction of the natural desires was legitimate; in fact, according to him they were intended to be satisfied. And in fact they were satisfied to the utmost point of sensual enjoyment by the Gurus, as well as the disciples who were mostly wealthy merchants. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, and even later, the religious feasts and festivals of the sect as well as the tours of the Gurus were marked by gross profligacy, and there is no doubt that every liberty was permitted by the women of the sect to the Maharajas. There was a sensational case in 1862 in Bombay High Court in which the licentiousness was exposed.

A sort of counter-reformation of this expression of Vaishnavism was undertaken by a man who was at first affiliated to this school. His name was Swami Narayan. During the first decades of the nineteenth century he carried on an energetic campaign against the loose life of the followers of Vallabhacharya. Through the example of his own life and the appeal of his religious and moral teaching he gained a large number of followers, and so the orthodox and the wealthy Vallabhites tried to persecute him. This, however, secured more and very militant followers for him.

As it happened, Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan of India, in the course of his journeys met him in 1825, and found him escorted by two hundred fully armed horsemen. The Bishop's bodyguard consisted of only fifty sepoys, who were met by the Guru's bodyguard with the clash of shields and tramp of horses. Heber wrote in his journal: 'I could not help smiling, though my sensations were in some degree painful and humiliating, at the idea of two religious teachers meeting at the head of little armies.' The Bishop added that the followers of Swami Narayan were ready to fight to the last drop of blood rather than suffer a fringe of his garment to be handled roughly.

This militancy, which was of a kind analogous to that of political leaders, persisted, and it was witnessed by Monier-Williams, then

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Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, when he visited the shrines of the Swami Narayan sect at Ahmedabad about fifty years later. The leaders of this sect had also become known as Maharajas by that time, and there was great rivalry between two of them. So, to show his importance, the more powerful Maharaja took Monier-Williams through a crowd of nearly ten thousand of his followers. Though accompanied by the English magistrate of the district, Monier-Williams was a little cowed by the spectacle. He wrote: 'The vast concourse swayed to and fro like the waves of a troubled sea, each man vociferating to his neighbours in a manner quite appalling. I could not help thinking of our apparent helplessness in the surging crowd, and asking myself how two solitary Europeans would be likely to fare, if, from some accidental circumstance, the religious fanaticism of a myriad of excited Hindus were to break loose and vent itself upon us.'

Followers of Chaitanya. This Vaishnava sect in its practices and devotional life presented an antithesis to that of Vallabhacharya, though doctrinally the two were not very different. The followers of Chaitanya were quietists, and they had to be wholly non-violent, humble, and unostentatious. However, a very important part of the devotions of the sect was to sing and dance to the accompaniment of an earthen drum either in assemblies or processions. This exerted an irresistible emotional power on the populace, and lately the appeal has spread to the West. I have seen the exhibitionism of British and American converts to the sect, and seen it not only in Oxford Street in London, but also in Texas, the home of the cowboys, and at Vancouver in Canada. The devotional aspect of this school will be considered later.

In its social aspect Chaitanya's teaching was both humanitarian and egalitarian. So it was to be expected that he would reject the caste system. One saying attributed to him was this: 'God's mercy does not regard caste or birth.' Another saying is that even a Chandala (a man of the untouchable caste) is to be honoured if he has faith, whereas an unbelieving performer of Vedic rites is not to be. In fact, Chaitanya is said to have converted many Muslims, even some ferocious Pathans, and one of his principal followers was a Muslim. In any case, the social aspect of Chaitanya's teaching, in addition to the character of his religious teaching, made him immensely popular with the common people. The majority of

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the members of his sect came from the trading and other lowly castes.

But in Hindu society it is not possible to override the principle of heredity and to abandon caste. As in the Vallabhacharya's sect so too in Chaitanya's, the leadership became dynastic, and in the membership of the sect the caste system was both maintained and extended.

Chaitanya relegated the leadership of his sect to two collaborators, both Brahmin. They were Advaita and Nityananda, who with him formed a triad of Maha-Prabhus (Great Masters) of the sect. Their descendants still exercise the leadership in Bengal. Six other followers were known as Gosvamis or Gosains (literally meaning 'master of cattle') and they settled at Brindaban. In addition, there were other families of leaders.

But the sect was not homogeneous in its membership, for it was divided into classes distinguished by their relationship to society. Some were vagrants or mendicants, wandering or living individually. They were called Vairagis. The second class was constituted by those who live a coenobitic life in *maths* and *akharas*, which were like the monasteries of the West. There were men as well as women in these groups, and each community was under a *mohant*, the equivalent of an abbot. The men and women were not segregated as in the West, but lived in the same monastery. The relationship between the Vaishnavas and the Vaishnavis was supposed to be brotherly and sisterly, but certainly in practice it was not so. The Vaishnavis were believed to have promiscuous sexual relations with the *mohant* or other Vaishnavas and this was generally regarded as normal.

To make matters more complicated, individual Vaishnavas often lived with a Vaishnavi who became his married wife by means of a very simple rite, and besides there was a Vaishnava caste, who lived the life of normal householders. The men and women from the *maths*, as well as the Vaishnava householders, often formed parties of professional singers, and went from place to place singing the ballads of Krishna, and making a living out of this.

The monastic Vaishnavas as well as the Vaishnava householders of the lower castes wore distinctive marks, insignia, and clothes. The two marks and signs by which they could be recognized were the sandal mark on the forehead and the necklace of beads made

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from the tulsi plant round the neck. They also wore saffron-coloured loin-clothes, but without the back-tuck. The coenobitic and vagrant Vaishnavas were also buried, not cremated like other Hindus.

Since this account of the sects is meant only to give a general idea of the character of sectarian differences, and not to describe them exhaustively, the other Vaishnava sects will not be described. For the same reason, an enumeration of the Saiva and Sakta sects will also be omitted. In their social aspect the Saiva sects were similar to the Vaishnava sects, especially the vagrant ones, while the Sakta sects were distinguished by their modes of devotion and rites, not by their organization.

Coenobitism and Vagrancy in the Sects

In recent centuries those Hindus who adopted religion as their sole vocation and profession have either wandered about the country individually but also in parties, taking up only temporary residence here and there, or lived in small or large permanent establishments like monasteries under a superior. The establishments were called *maths, akharas,* or *asthals,* and were scattered all over the country. Some of these were very wealthy and highly regarded, as the five *maths* attributed to Samkaracharya. The heads of such *maths* had immense prestige, and might be called princes of the Hindu church. As to the rest, there was an immense range in importance and wealth. Their income was derived partly from landed property and partly from gifts from the lay public who came to them as visitors or pilgrims. In addition, the inmates of the *maths* also collected food and money by begging.

The actual buildings might be mere huts or sumptuous palaces. They had quarters for the superior and his family when they were married, for the *chelas* or disciples, and also for servants of both sexes. Outsiders could come and visit the shrines, and accommodation was always provided for them in separate rooms. No one could be forbidden entry into these establishments. The shrine was dedicated to the particular deity of the sect, and his daily service was exactly like the service and rites in the temples. Devotional life properly so-called was a private concern of each inmate. Normally no such life existed.

The head of the establishment was called *mohant.* He was either

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hereditary or elected from among the disciples. Often, the election was by the simple nomination by the previous *mohant*. At times during British rule, the question of succession was taken to the courts. As a whole, considered socially, these establishments might be regarded as the religious wing of secular landlordism.

Vagrancy has already been described as the predatory expression of Hindu religious life. The wandering sadhus represented the most numerous element of those who followed religion professionally. When organized in orders they obtained recruits continuously. Two special groups might be singled out.

The first of them is constituted by the Aghor Panthis or Aghorias, who originally practised both human sacrifice and cannibalism, but in recent times only the latter. Their rites had disappeared from open practice even under Muslim rule, but there is reason to believe that some of these continued secretly even under British rule. These men ate even carrion and filth. Normally, they ate dead bodies, stealing them from funeral pyres. It is recorded that during the Mutiny these ascetics followed the troops and dined off the soldiers who were killed. A friend of mine has related that they stole a corpse in a village near Calcutta during his childhood. They also smeared their body with human excreta. They are not known to exist now.

The other group of ascetics are the Nagas or naked sadhus. They could be both Saiva or Vaishnavite, though the majority of them belonged to the first sect. There was no furtiveness about them, and they flaunted their nudity without any self-consciousness. Immense numbers of them formed corps according to the orders to which they belonged. They can still be seen at the bathing festivals, especially during the Kumbha Mela.

It is these vagrant sadhus who had the most warlike habits. Though completely naked they, especially the Vaishnava Nagas, always carried weapons. They were also given to extreme aggressiveness in asserting their precedence at the festivals. Before the establishment of British rule in upper India there was a bloody riot at Hardwar between two sects of the Nagas in which it was reported that 18,000 sadhus were killed. Such things were, of course, exceptional, and an extreme manifestation of Hindu sectarianism. But in its own way this extremism was also typical; it illustrated the wide compass and endless variety of Hindu religiosity.

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Chapter Five

RELIGIOUS CONTROL OF HINDU LIFE

IN the introduction it has been shown that for the Hindus their religion was a means of living in the world and making their lives successful, happy, and even sanctified, that is to say, living under the Hindu form of grace. It followed from this that their religion exercised a rigorous control over their lives in every aspect and in every activity. So no account of Hinduism can be complete without a description of these manifold controls. To omit that and confine oneself only to those features of Hinduism which are religious from the Western point of view, will be not only giving a partial account, but also seriously misrepresenting it. And to hold forth only on the Upanishads and the Vedanta philosophy with ineffable woolliness would be falsification. Unfortunately, this kind of falsification has become not only common, but even deliberate. Obedience to the inhibitions and taboos which this side of Hinduism has created is as much a part of the Way of Works *(Karma Marga)* of the Hindus as is the scrupulous performance of the rites of the religion.

Submission to Taboos

If a Hindu did not observe these taboos he was subjected to the most cruel social coercion. In extreme cases, he would be subjected to what is Hindu excommunication, and that, so long as it could be imposed, was very concrete. When excommunicated, which, actually, was being boycotted, nobody would visit him, eat with him, or give help in cremation by carrying the dead body to the burning ghat. Even the village barber would not cut his hair or shave him, nor the washerman wash his clothes. The fear of losing caste in this way was the most efficient sanction behind all the restrictive customs of Hinduism.

I shall cite three examples of this. The first was given by Tagore from his own experience. One great Calcutta grandee had gone to visit another grandee, who was a graduate of Calcutta Univer-

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sity. When after the visit the first Raja was getting into his landau the host Raja pulled him by his coat, and said: 'You are chewing *pan* (betel)!' Now, when a Hindu is eating anything he cannot be in any kind of contact with another man who is not of his caste, and to be in contact with a Mussulman was the worst pollution. All coachmen in Calcutta were Muslims. The visiting Raja had to spit out what still remained in his mouth of the *pan* which his host had given him.

The next example is from my experience. In November 1927 I was travelling by train from my native town in eastern Bengal to Calcutta, and in the compartment were two Muslim gentlemen. Feeling thirsty, I took out an orange and began to eat it. I knew, of course, that I could not eat cooked food or drink water when a Muslim was under the same roof (even of a railway carriage), but I was not aware that I could not eat even fruit. So I was very much surprised when a fellow Hindu began to wink at me, looking significantly at the Muslims. He said nothing as long as they were in the carriage. But when at the nearest station, where the stoppage was long, they got down to stretch their legs, he asked me in an aggrieved tone why I had eaten the orange with Muslims in the compartment. I replied that I did not mind, upon which he asked me where I came from. I mentioned my village, and he again asked me whether I was a Chaudhuri of Banagram. When I said that I was, he remarked with great asperity: 'If a man from such a family as yours sets such an example what will *not* the common people do?'

Last of all, I shall give an example of the cruelty of the social boycott, the story of which was told me by my father, who became concerned with it as a lawyer. A certain man in a village near my birthplace had been boycotted, and when his grown-up son died, no one would come to help him to carry the body to the burning place or bring firewood for the cremation. He carried the body alone, and was cutting down some trees to obtain the faggots. The village people who had put him on the blacklist collected at a short distance and began to jeer at him. Enraged beyond endurance, he struck one of them with his axe. Of course he was prosecuted for grievous assault, and no lawyer would undertake his defence. My father did.

Of course, this case was very exceptional. But such exceptions made the taboos obeyed. Apart from it most Hindus were so

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conditioned psychologically that they would submit willingly. They obeyed all the injunctions just as people in civilized countries obey an elaborate criminal law, especially one like the English Common Law. In the course of their daily life, the Hindus learned and observed these rules as people learn and observe social and table manners. In fact, it may be pointed out that when such restraints, however irrational, are felt to be burdensome it is to be assumed that the way of life to which they belong has become decadent.

The Political Reason

From the very beginning of Hindu culture there was a socio-political reason behind such controls. At the end of the eighteenth century these had become even more stringent because of Muslim domination, and British rule, being equally foreign, was an equal threat to the Hindu way of life. I give the history of the growth of the taboos from the earliest times to the nineteenth century briefly.

As foreign colonists in India the Aryans found their way of life threatened from the first by a native population. So, adherence without questioning and in its entirety to the customs and practices which they had brought with them, i.e. an unwavering loyalty to the *mos majorum*, became the basic principle of their life in India, for they were not ready to give up their group identity and culture. This accounts for the attitude to the Vedas as the religious basis of all their way of life and as the fundamental charter of their existence in India, though they did not practise the religion found in them, nor even understood them wholly. This sense of duty to the Aryan heritage must also have been felt in respect of minor customs. No feature at all of the original way of life was to be abandoned.

The rigidity increased through the ages as the danger to the identity continued and grew. The first threat was from the non-Aryan aboriginals, and it was dealt with by introducing a system of apartheid which was applied in one way to the free aboriginals and in another to the servile aboriginals. The first were left in geographical isolation in their jungles and hills, the second in social isolation through untouchability. Thus a pattern of coexistence was created.

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Then came a new threat from the external non-Aryan barbarians—the nomadic and semi-nomadic people who invaded India from the first century B.C. to the third century A.D. and again in the fifth century. The last horde of invaders, the Huns, created as great a terror in India as they did in Europe. Their invasion must have fixed the notion of *Mlechchha*, unclean foreigners, which henceforth stood for the external enemies of the Hindu order. In addition, it must also have created the image of Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Vishnu and the destroyer of the *Mlechchhas*, who rode on a war-horse and wielded a sword as flaming as a comet. From this time, *Anarya* (the non-Aryan) yielded place to the *Mlechchha* (the unclean foreigner) as the enemy of the Hindus.

These invaders were absorbed, but no sooner was the process completed than a new and far more dangerous enemy appeared who could never be absorbed. This enemy was the Muslim, who threatened the Hindu way of life in a manner never seen before. The Muslims asserted the superiority of their own way of life, and began an active onslaught on Hinduism. Therefore the old loyalty to the Hindu way became fanatical, and all the tried means of protection were refurbished both internally and externally. Henceforth there could be no question of abandoning any feature of the religion, rational or irrational.

At the next stage the English created a new threat, and the notion of *Mlechchha*, together with the developed system of defence against Islam, was extended to the new rulers. However, in the exercise of their political power the English did not show themselves as the enemy of Hinduism. On the contrary, they were extremely careful not to give offence to Hindu susceptibilities. Even when they had to stop inhuman practices like infanticide or the burning of widows, they took these steps with extreme reluctance and dilatoriness. However, the Hindus were not disarmed in their fears, for they felt that a new danger was arising from within. The impact of Western culture through education in English was inducing the Hindus themselves to question their religion as it was and to change their outlook and habits of living. The Muslims had used force, the English held out temptations, and that was a greater peril.

At first the old Hindu order could not resist the influence of their Western education, and many Hindus started an active

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movement of religious reform. But the same education and the writings of the European Orientalists enabled other Hindus to create a new and powerful conservatism. It is the arguments of these conservatives which enable us to get a retrospective insight into the Hindu mind as it worked in earlier times to make the entire body of beliefs and practices a single block, impervious to changes.

The Hindu conservatives of the nineteenth century saw the enemy, not in the Englishman, but in their own reformers, and told them that the so-called superstitions of the Hindus had very good reasons behind them and were not to be abandoned thoughtlessly. This campaign was noted even by the English administrators. Sir Henry Maine as Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University told the students at a convocation in 1866 that they were committing a mistake by calling in ingenious analogies and subtle explanations to justify usages which they did not venture to defend directly, and then observed: 'There is no greater delusion than to suppose that you weaken an error by giving it a colour of truth. On the contrary, you give it pertinacity and vitality, and greater power for evil.'

But as nationalism grew under British rule, so did the religious conservatism. The movement of the Hindu mind in this direction was bound to find its way into imaginative literature. So, in a famous novel by Tagore—*Gora*—which was published in 1910 but depicted the religious controversies of the last decades of the nineteenth century, a young neo-Hindu is made to say to a Hindu reformer: 'It is only by learning by rote from English books that you are calling these customs evil. You will have the right to speak in this way only when you have acquired the capacity to speak about the evil customs of the English in exactly the same manner.' He defined his position by saying: 'My point is that our understanding of the real aims of our society can become limpid only when we have accepted it wholly in all its aspects. To quarrel with it, is not simply to obstruct it, but also to misunderstand it.' This total obedience was the demand of the Hindu conservatives even under British rule. Though the arguments they employed cannot be traced back to any previous age, there can be no doubt it was thinking on such lines that induced Hindus of older times to defend their religious and social heritage in its entirety, even when it was irrational. A closed society does not change willingly,

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and when it survives in the face of attacks on it, it becomes all the more incapable of giving up anything. Thus it may be said that from the ancient Aryan self-consciousness to the recent Hindu self-consciousness there is an unbroken line of descent.

Control of Daily Life

The actual control of personal and social life of the Hindu by his religion has now to be described. It is quite impossible to describe all the injunctions and taboos, and so only a sampling will be offered. To a Hindu exponent of the sacred law of old times this account will appear to be sadly attenuated, but to a non-Hindu it will seem, even from the relatively small selection I am giving by way of illustration, that in his daily life a Hindu is bound hand and foot in regard to all his actions.

The ultimate source of all the rules is the sacred law, or *Dharma Sastra*, in the ancient texts like the *Manu Samhita* and the *Parasara Samhita*. These texts are also called *Smriti* (Traditions) collectively, and when British rule was established in India there were Brahmins who had specialized in it, as they had specialized in philosophy or grammar. When any question of what was permissible or not permissible arose it was referred to one or a number of these authorities, and they gave their opinion. But the opinion had always to be supported by a definite text.

For the greater part, the rules were so well established that they had become custom, so that even when no authority for a practice could be found in any text it was binding if it had been customary for a long time. In the early nineteenth century the two regions of India in which the injunctions and prohibitions were most rigorously enforced were Bengal and the Tamil country. I do not, however, have any first-hand knowledge of Tamil practices, nor do I know the texts which were followed in that region. So the account given here is of the practices in Bengal, of which I have fairly full knowledge. In Bengal the rules of the *Dharma Sastras* had been summarized and codified by a great authority on *Smriti*, Raghunandana, whose version of them was regarded as binding. Only in the case of very difficult points was any reference to the ancient texts made, though every pundit knew the most important of them almost by heart. Of the rules I am enumerating I can say that even down to the end of the nineteenth century no

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Bengali Hindu would have dared to disobey any. On the contrary, it was a matter of pride for all Hindus to be unfailing in doing what was enjoined and in refraining from all that was forbidden. This they described as having *achara* (observance, good conduct) and *vichara* (discriminating between actions). The Muslims and the British were held in contempt as people who had neither *achara* nor *vichara*.

A further general observation has to be made about the permissibility and non-permissibility of actions of every kind. Even when a certain thing was permitted it could become forbidden for certain persons, in certain conditions, and at certain times. For instance, a particular food which was universally eaten could become impure and therefore uneatable, and again it could not be eaten on certain days and at certain times. These special restrictions will be dealt with in the sections 'Pure and Impure States' and 'Astral Control of Actions', which follow. In this section only general permissibility and non-permissibility is being set down.

Food and Drink. There is sufficient historical evidence for thinking that the food habits of the Hindus in ancient times were different from what they became later. Meat was certainly eaten, at least by the warrior caste, which included the entire princely order and the aristocracy. There are references to this in the *Mahabharata*. In one of his inscriptions the Emperor Asoka set down that, before his mind had turned to Dharma (Buddhism), thousands of animals were slaughtered for the royal kitchen, but that at the date of the inscription this had been brought down to one peacock and one gazelle. The medical treatise attributed to Charaka, which is placed among the scriptures (*Sastra*), definitely says that for nutrition no food can surpass meat. Furthermore, the old Sanskrit word for a cook is *Supakara* (maker of broth or soup), and it must not be forgotten that both the Sanskrit word *supa* and the English-French 'soup' are derived from the Indo-European root *seu*.

But the date at which vegetarianism became established among the twice-born castes cannot be determined. Nevertheless, by the eighteenth century it had become binding on all high-caste Hindus except in Bengal, as it is also today. The strength of the taboo will be understood from the following facts: modern Hindu

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women, who both in India and in England get drunk on strong spirituous liquors and have no scruples about sexual intercourse, will yet not eat meat; I have also seen Hindu men in Delhi who have been educated abroad, sniffing at the snacks taken round in diplomatic cocktail parties to detect if they contain meat.

But there were exceptions. Lower castes generally ate meat. In the Punjab, generally, the men would eat it but not the women. In Bengal all castes and classes took and take animal food, i.e. fish and meat, although some refrain for the sake of holiness or self-restraint. Widows, of course, cannot eat any animal food. Hindus also cannot eat certain vegetables like onions and garlic.

Beef is the supreme taboo for all Hindus, and observance of this taboo is for all practical purposes the only infallible religious test for them. This is an extension of the worship of the cow and abstention from cow-killing, which was the most common reason behind Hindu-Muslim riots before politics came into this feud. But here, too, there is indisputable historical evidence that in ancient times the Hindus could eat beef. In fact, it was considered to be the best food which could be offered to a *Rishi* (Sage) or a very distinguished guest.

As to other meats, in Bengal there was and is no bar against that of goats (male but not female), sheep, deer, pigeons, and ducks. Chicken, however, was taboo. Normally, traditional Hindus did not slaughter goats for the undisguised purpose of eating. So if they wanted to eat meat they would send a goat or two as a sacrificial offering to Kali, which was easy because every Hindu village in Bengal had a temple of the goddess. After the sacrifice the head was taken by the goddess (i.e. by the priest as her proxy) and the carcass brought away by the sacrificer to be cooked and eaten. In my young days in Calcutta there was a meat shop which attracted Hindu customers by slaughtering the goats before a large clay image of Kali.[1]

Fish was the common animal food in Bengal, and all classes of Bengalis ate it. But it was not only not eaten, but loathed in northern India. Actually, eating of fish was the greatest religious offence which Bengali Hindus gave to other Hindus. The objection to eating fish was on mythological grounds. A fish was the

[1] I myself as a boy many times bought meat from this shop.

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first incarnation of Vishnu, and so eating fish amounted to eating Vishnu in all his forms, including Krishna. A very large number of Bengalis were Vaishnavite, i.e. worshippers of Vishnu as Krishna, and they were also very devout. But north Indian Hindus mocked at their claim to worship Krishna. I one day heard a Hindustani sadhu who was smeared with ashes shouting at all the Bengalis passing before him: 'Oh, Bengalis, you worship Krishna? Krishna goes out by your arse.' In Delhi, the pundit who taught Sanskrit to my sons spat on the ground when he saw my wife buying fish at the door.

To drink alcohol is a major sin in Hindu sacred law, while murder, unless it is the murder of a Brahmin, is not. The expiation for drinking it is to drink boiling alcohol and die. Even association with a drinker is a sin. In India anyone who sells spirituous drinks becomes untouchable, and there are castes of wine-sellers as of merchants of other commodities. Nevertheless, there is historical evidence that various kinds of wines were drunk throughout India by the princes and warriors, and even by the womenfolk of these classes. It would seem that the prohibition of alcohol in Hindu sacred law was like the prohibition in Islamic sacred law, *Sharia*. Among the Muslims, too, the princes and the nobles drank habitually, while the priests and learned men did not.

A not less binding control in connection with food and drink was that which concerned commensality, or, to be more accurate, acceptance of food and drink from other people. No Hindu could eat with anybody who did not belong to his caste. It was not simply that a Brahmin could not be in bodily contact with or sit alongside a man of another caste, he could not even eat with him under the same roof, sitting at a distance. So, at banquets the different castes, even though all socially high, would be seated in different halls or in wholly separated areas in an open courtyard.

All this did not imply the slightest social disrespect for anybody. A Kayastha would not mind if a poor Brahmin whom he employed as priest, agent, or even cook, did not eat with him. This was giving to God things which were God's, forgetting Caesar for the time being. Nor did it follow that a Hindu could not entertain his Muslim friends or a Muslim his Hindu friends. At weddings friends of both communities could be asked, but separate arrangements would be made for each under the management of Muslims

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for Muslims and Brahmins for Hindus, and under separate marquees.[1]

It should be added that in well-to-do families in which the women did not cook, only Brahmin cooks would be employed, and neither the men nor the women, even if they were not twice-born, would take food cooked by servants of the Sudra caste. As a matter of fact, cooking became the sole profession of poor Brahmins who were not educated enough to be priests and of Brahmin women who were destitute.

All these restrictions applied to cooked food, and to the acceptance of cooked food. Raw foodstuffs could be accepted from anybody. But acceptance of water was more complicated. It could not be drunk if a Muslim or an untouchable was under the same roof, and it could be taken only from the hands of a man who was of a caste which was 'water-permissible'. All Hindus had to know which castes were so and which were not. All water in a room had to be thrown away if a man from whom it was not permissible to take water came into it. But milk could be taken from anybody if it was *not boiled*. Boiling destroyed its immunity from ritualistic pollution.

Clothing and Adornment. Rules in respect of clothing were only slightly less rigorous than those for food and drink. In ancient times, it would seem they were stricter, or rather there could be no question of any departure from Hindu usages. But the Muslim conquest and rule brought into India a wholly different family of clothing, and that made adjustments necessary. These were, however, kept to the minimum, and no departures from the Hindu costume were permitted in private and religious life.

The first requirement in all Hindu clothing was that it could not be sewn: the Hindu could wear only unsewn clothing which had to be draped round the body. Normally, both for men and women, there had to be two pieces of cloth, one worn round the waist to cover the lower limbs, and the other thrown round the

[1] Till my young days, a Kayastha could not invite a Brahmin directly to a feast, but had to employ a Brahmin as an intermediary. So, when in 1916 I went to invite Brahmin families to the feast at my sister's wedding, a Brahmin accompanied me. He pointed to me and said that he was speaking on my behalf.

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torso. But the full dress for women would consist of three pieces, the third piece being a girdle like the Roman *zona*.

But this was not enough. To distinguish himself from the non-Aryans the Aryan had to wear his lower piece with two tucks (*kaccha* in Sanskrit), one end going through the legs and tucked at the back in the middle of the waist, and the other gathered and worn in a flounce tucked above or below the navel in front. For normal occasions these two tucks would be sufficient, but for religious rites a third was necessary. The end of the flounce had to be taken up and tucked at the left side of the waist. Women also had the tucks. In south and western India the women had these till very recent times, and even now the orthodox wear their sari in this way.

When the Muslims came to India they would not tolerate this dress in the Hindus whom they employed, because among them it was indecent to keep the body bare. So the Hindus who served them had to wear the Muslim dress, and henceforth they kept it for all ceremonial and public appearance. This was permitted, but with a very important reservation. These sewn garments could not be taken into the inner apartments of any house, far less into the family shrines. The wearers had to put them off in a dressing-room in the outer house, put on the Hindu dress, purify themselves by sprinkling themselves with Ganges water, and then go into the women's rooms. This rule was extended to European clothing when the British came. In my young days in Calcutta I saw the master's European clothes hanging in a dressing room by the side of the outer sitting-room.

When the restrictions became less rigorous and both men and women began to wear a sewn upper garment, they had nevertheless to put that off for religious ceremonies, including weddings. The religious part of the ceremony could not be gone through with sewn clothing on, though a most elaborate crown, in the shape of that seen on the heads of the princes in the paintings of the Ajanta caves and made of pith and tinsel, had to be worn by the bridegroom. Another important restriction was that no clothes made from cotton could be worn for any religious ceremony. The participators had to be dressed in silk.

The rule about the permissibility of certain kinds of clothing and the manner of wearing it had as its converse another rule which forbade the use of clothing which was obligatory for reli-

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gious ceremonies or even in daily wear, for impure actions, such as defecating and urinating. The clothes in which a Hindu did the former could not be kept on afterwards, and had to be put off and washed. So to go to a closet men and women simply wrapped a towel round the waist. In my young days I myself saw both men and women throw away either the dhoti or the sari as they slipped into the closet like a rabbit going into its hole.

Again, the tucks being a quasi-religious feature of Hindu clothing, the back tuck could not be kept on when urinating, though its removal was not necessary for the act. So all strict Hindus squatted and removed the back tuck, keeping its upper end in his left hand during the act. The failure to do so made him subject to a religious sanction; for if the tuck was kept the urine went into the mouth of the departed ancestors if its flow was to the left, and into the mouths of the gods if it was to the right.

As to ornaments, most of them were of solid gold, precious stones not being very highly regarded. But gold, being a noble metal, could not be worn below the belt. So the ankle and toe ornaments were in silver. But the hips being very highly prized among feminine charms, the hip girdle furnished with jingles and slung across the widest and highest part, could be of gold. Widows could not wear any ornaments, and in Bengal, as soon as the body of the dead husband was taken to the burning ghat, all ornaments were ceremonially removed from the limbs of the widowed woman, and if she had glass bangles they were taken off and broken. A widow who wore ornaments was regarded as loose. Here it might be mentioned that the widows could not wear saris with a coloured border, but only a white sheet. *Per contra*, a married woman in Bengal had always to wear an iron bangle (plated in gold in well-to-do families), for otherwise the husband was likely to come to harm. In other provinces these insignia were different; for instance, in upper India married Hindu women wore a silver toe ring.

As to make-up, widows could not wear vermilion, whereas vermilion at the hair-parting was obligatory for a married woman with her husband living. Unmarried girls could not have vermilion there, but they could wear it on the forehead as decoration.

The question of cutting hair was a far more serious matter. To cut it for certain purposes and not to cut it otherwise were religious

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obligations for a man. Married women had to wear their hair long, but widows very short. For them it was cut at the same time as the ornaments were removed.

For the men a *sikha* (tuft of hair) at the top of the head or at its back was necessary for performing the daily devotions of the twice-born. Therefore it had to be kept. On the other hand, hair could not be cut for the sake of appearance. There were only nine legitimate occasions for cutting hair, e.g. pilgrimage, death of father, mother, and preceptor, conception, purification, etc. Now, the great Hindu reformer Rammohun Roy, who habitually affected the Muslim costume, also cut his hair regularly. He was ferociously attacked by the pundits for this.

Guilt and Atonement

The basic feature of Hinduism is that in it the notion of sin is not confined to matters which the West regards as religious or moral (showing, as the Hindu thinks, a narrowness of outlook on life), but covers almost everything that can befall a householder or be done by him, e.g. the accidental death of a cow, being bitten by a dog, or sexual intercourse during the day. All conceivable transgressions from the murder of a Brahmin, incest, or robbery to those just referred to are classified in order of gravity, with due regard to justice and the degree of responsibility. In doing so the treatises on sacred law *(Dharma Sastras* or *Smriti)* display that relentless logic which makes all Hindu reasoning the height of irrationality.

In this section nothing will be said about the offences which are religious or moral in the modern sense, but only a small selection will be given from those which arise from normal worldly life. Hindu sacred law classifies offences as *Ati-pataka* (sins beyond classification), *Maha-pataka* (great sins), *Anu-pataka* (minor sins which are equivalent to mortal sins), and *Upa-pataka* (venial sins).

1. If a man has sexual intercourse during the day-time, bathes naked, or looks upon a naked woman *who is another man's wife and not his own*, he must expiate for the offence by fasting for a day.

2. If a man will *not* have sexual intercourse with his wife at the end of her menstruation, provided it is not a festival day, he will have to make a penance.

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3. If a man has repeated sexual intercourse on a festival day he must make the same penance.

4. If a man eats after massaging oil on his body but without bathing first he must bathe and recite the *Gayatri mantra* 1,008 times.

5. If a man or a woman eats while wearing blue cloth he must fast for three nights if he did so accidentally, but for six nights if it was done deliberately.

6. If a man is bitten by a jackal, beast of prey, horse, mule, boar, monkey, crow, or unchaste woman, he has to go through a penance, which varies according to whether he is bitten above or below the navel, on his trunk or in the head, and whether the wound is superficial or deep. If there is a deep bite above the navel he must bathe either in the sea or a river and fast a hundred times.

For most of these offences the penance is *Prajapatya*, which lasts 12 days, during which meals have to be regulated as follows—for the first 3 days, only at night and restricted to 22 mouthfuls; for the next 3 days both day and night but restricted to 26 mouthfuls; for 3 days following only to take food which is given unasked, restricted to 28 mouthfuls; and finally 3 days' complete fast. There are other penances equally elaborate.

The most serious offence in this category of *Upa-pataka* (venial sins) is, of course, the death, intentional or unintentional, of a cow. A householder is responsible even if a cow dies from cold, fire, strangling by a rope when straining for food, drowning, falling in a pit, or is killed by a tiger. Penance is prescribed even if a horn, bone, the tail, or an ear is injured. Castration of a bull calf has to be expiated. However, no penance is called for if an ox dies in the following circumstances: having been previously diseased and after being yoked to a plough or cart it falls down when beaten, but gets up, walks at least seven paces, takes grass and water, and dies only after that.

But expiations for these bovine deaths are graded by the castes as well, and they are categorized as follows: deliberate killing of a Brahmin's cow by a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or Vaisya, or unintentional killing in the same caste group; deliberate killing by a Sudra of a cow belonging to a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or Vaisya, and similar unintentional killing. In this manner all the possible

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combinations of the four castes are worked out. There is necessarily a difference of responsibility and expiation for culpable bovicide amounting to murder, and non-culpable bovicide. The killing of cows in calf is a greater offence.

For the death of a cow or ox there are Sastric penances, but there is also a popular penance, which is to go from door to door with a rope round the neck and grass in the mouth, beg food by bellowing, and eat only the grains so obtained.

On the other hand, if anyone falsely accuses a man of causing the death of a cow he is also subject to a severe penance. This is treated as a very serious libel.

There is only one other transgression which has to be mentioned, one that made its appearance in the nineteenth century and was dealt with in the established manner. It was to travel to England for professional education or on business. At some unknown date sea voyages had become taboo for the Hindus, and those who came to England were further suspected of eating beef. Therefore when they went back to India they were made to go through an elaborate expiation ceremony, after which alone were they restored to their place in their caste. Otherwise, they became outcaste. This practice remained in force even down to 1920.

In the last century the penance was uniformly required, and many men remained outside the pale even after that, and could not marry among the orthodox. Max Müller has related a very interesting anecdote about Dwarkanath Tagore, a very wealthy Bengali landowner and grandfather of the poet Tagore, who was living in Paris in great style. Young Max Müller asked him if he would have to perform penance after his return to India. He laughed and replied: 'No, I am all this time feeding a large number of Brahmins at home, and that is quite penance enough.' Part of the rite of penance for crossing the 'black waters' was to swallow five products of the cow called *pancha gavya*, namely, milk, ghee, curds, urine, and dung. There was one very important part of the expiation, and that was the bestowing of gifts to Brahmins according to one's capacity. Also, for social transgressions which were analogous to these taboos a family had to pay a social fine to the leading families of the village, which shared it, and this was called *Samajik* in Bengal. It may even be said that there was hardly any sin in Hinduism which could not be remitted by money. In ancient times it was gift of cattle, and later it became hard cash.

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Astral Control

The Hindus always were, and in their overwhelming majority still are, firm in their conviction that everything in their mundane existence is determined and controlled by the planets and stars. The stars were not, of course, all those which were visible to the naked eye, but only 27 or 28, i.e. those which were in the stages of the moon. Even today nothing is undertaken without finding out whether the hour is propitious, and to deny the influence of stars is to provoke derisive contempt. In my young days stories were told of mythical Englishmen who did not believe in the influence of the stars, but who became converted through experience.

Usually, the Brahmin priests, who were also the astrologers, were consulted as to the suitable hour. But the more common actions could have their times determined by an elderly householder, who decided with the help of the almanac. It gave all the information needed under each date and day, and more than any Hindu scripture it was the family Bible. Even today all families except the very westernized have the annual almanac, and large impressions are printed of the more established ones.

I shall give a random example of the entries on one day: the first day of the Bengali year 1376 (1 Vaisakha = 14 April 1969). They begin with a mention of the phase of the moon and the position of the stars. Then the influence of the stars and planets is described, and also the class to which a person born on that day will belong (see below). After that the auspicious and inauspicious periods of the day are specified. Lastly, come specific prohibitions and permissions: aubergines cannot be eaten till 11 hours, 43 minutes, and 2 seconds at night; after that a particular kind of pulse cannot be eaten, nor can women, oil, fish, meat, etc., be enjoyed; penances cannot be undertaken. As to travelling, it is on the whole permissible, but not towards the east or south; after 4.48.58 only east is forbidden, but after 8.7.2 south is again forbidden. Paddy can be cut during the whole day, but journeys by boat, commercial transactions, the making of idols of the gods, preparing and taking of medicines, sowing seeds, planting trees, taking and giving loans must be done before 4.48.58 in the afternoon. Women, oil, fish, and meat are always grouped together for specifying the times permissible for their enjoyment.

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Time of birth. Though all other acts could be performed at a chosen time, the time of birth was beyond control, and therefore it was the fixed datum for finding out what an individual's life would be, what he would be capable of doing, and what his aptitudes would be. And not only that, from this date and hour even particular events of a person's life could be calculated.

The time would be given to the family's *jyotishi* or astrologer, and he would prepare the horoscope of the child, indicating not only the general trends—that is to say, whether he or she will be happy and prosperous and at what periods—but also specific events at certain ages, and more especially dangers to his life or career. With the help of this information both the parents and the person concerned would remain confident or reconciled on the one hand, and on the other would be able to take preventive measures against the evils predicted. These were propitiatory or magical ceremonies.

In a Hindu, faith in his horoscope was far stronger than his faith in any god or goddess or even God, and this faith was evinced in every act of his life. If a particular prediction in a horoscope came untrue that made no difference, for it could always be explained away by assuming an error in giving the exact time of birth.

Marriage. Success and happiness in the married state was assumed to be completely under astral control, and therefore the main use of the horoscope for a practical end was in connection with marriages. Even if both the parties in a match were otherwise highly eligible from worldly considerations a marriage proposal could be rejected if the horoscope indicated any incompatibility of nature between the bridegroom and the bride. The agreement was called *Yotaka*, and the best agreement was described as *Raja Yotaka.*

But its determination was complicated. By one calculation all persons belonged to one or other of three orders according to the day of their birth; the order of the divinities, of the humans, and of the demons. Marriages within each other were sought, because in that case the nature of husband and wife would agree. Marriages between the gods and the demons resulted in conflicts because in Hindu mythology these two were always at war, but marriage between a human and a demon was bound to result in the death of the person of the human order.

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A far more complicated agreement was determined by means of the zodiacal signs and the stars. Persons born under one or other of these fell into eight categories. Permutations and combinations among these created an immense range of desirability or undesirability in marriages. This may be illustrated by taking only two of the categories: the category of dominance and the category of species. The first depended on the zodiacal signs. Thus a person born under Leo would dominate persons born under all the rest, but, among the latter, persons born under the biped zodiacal signs dominated those born under quadruped signs. For example, one born under the Gemini dominated one born under Capricornus. It was desirable that the groom should belong to the dominant sign.

On the other hand, the species category was determined by the star under which a person was born. To mention two pairs of species: a person born under Spica belonged to the tiger species, whereas one born under Alpherat belonged to the cow species; again, one born under Pollux was a cat while one born under Regulus was a rat. It would be obvious that such persons could not marry one another. In this manner the agreement had to be worked out over all the eight categories. It was no wonder therefore that in the case of specially desirable matches false horoscopes were often furnished.

A different kind of astral control of marriages was about the days and hours of the wedding. Weddings could not take place at all in certain months. In Bengal three months were wholly forbidden, and these were Bhadra, Paus, and Chaitra. The day and the hour were given by the priest. No Hindu wedding could take place at day-time. But it could at any time between dusk and dawn, according to astrological calculations.

Other Activities. These necessarily included everything besides those already mentioned. Nothing is excluded, and for everything that can be done, certain days and hours are propitious, while others are not. Even now no application for a job or nomination for a parliamentary election is submitted without consulting an astrologer.

All religious festivals have their days predetermined round the year, and for them, though the season remains constant, the particular days vary wihtin a month. Religious ceremonies which

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concern individuals have on the contrary to be fixed *ad hoc*, and there are options in respect of months and days. If for any reason a month is inconvenient for a householder he can choose another month. However, the ceremonies must be performed not only on days free from objection, but on days and at times which are particularly favourable so that they may be fully effective.

The whole system is so complex, with checks from so many different data, that it is impossible to say on what general principle it is based. But whatever the theory, every malign astral influence must be avoided and every benign influence ensured. For instance, the position of a star (or what the Hindus regard as a star) may be the deciding factor, but a day of the week by itself may be propitious or unpropitious. Thus, leaving out the stars, Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays are auspicious for all actions; Sundays, Tuesdays, and Saturdays for certain actions only.

There is no doubt that the discrimination between days has come down from very ancient times, i.e. from the age in which the Hindus had political independence. So it was laid down in the almanacs published during British rule that Sunday was suitable for coronation, for beginning a military campaign, while Tuesday was suitable for taking up military commands, for training in the use of weapons, and for hunting. The almanac for 1969 which I am using for giving all this information also lays down that Tuesdays are propitious for theft; that for riding an elephant or a horse for the first time Saturdays are auspicious. But again certain hours of the day, otherwise good, may have certain times when action is harmful. This is particularly true of the afternoon of Thursday.

In recent times it was in respect of journeys that the question of the auspicious hour became most important, for going on a journey at an inauspicious hour could result in death. It was natural therefore that the injunctions regarding journeys should be very elaborate. The favourable and unfavourable combinations were so many that reconciling all of them was never easy, and various loopholes were provided to make journeys possible when they became absolutely necessary. For instance, if a man had to go on a certain day or a certain hour and that was inauspicious he could leave his bedroom at an auspicious hour before the starting time, and wait in another room.

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Though this has nothing to do with stars, it might be mentioned in this context that certain omens are good for journeys. A man will be successful in the object of his journey if, when he sets out, he sees a king, a Brahmin, a prostitute, a cow with a calf, flames which are twirling on the right side, a banner, or fresh meat.

It is particularly dangerous to go towards certain directions on certain days, because on these days the direction in question is 'spiked' or 'speared'. The west is spiked on Sunday and Friday, north on Tuesday and Wednesday, east on Monday and Saturday, and south on Wednesday and Thursday. If a man goes in these directions when they are spiked he will die even if he is as powerful as the god Indra. In my young days I could see what terror the idea of going in a 'spiked' direction caused to my fellow Hindus.

Pure and Impure States

A Hindu's concept of life was dominated by the notion of impurity. All material things, including the human body, could become horribly impure, and some were intrinsically and irredeemably impure. This idea was as obsessive as the idea of the innate sinfulness of man has been to many Christians. To the Hindu Pharisees of this description (and they were mostly women) *all* things were naturally unclean and had to be purified. The purification was the Hindu counterpart of Christian regeneration. But while the Christian could become regenerate only through the grace of God, a Hindu could always employ a rational and material means of purification, for example, water or cow dung. The latter was obligatory to purify the cooking oven.

To begin with the material universe. During both solar and lunar eclipses the whole atmosphere and earth became impure, and no Hindu could take food, urinate, or defecate as long as they lasted. Next, Mother Earth herself became impure for three days every year during the rainy season, when she, like a woman, was supposed to menstruate. At that time widows would not take food or even water.

For understandable reasons roads and paths were regarded as generally impure. So, after a journey or walk, men and women would always wash their feet, hands, and face, as well as change clothes. This certainly originated with the idea of dirt in a physical sense, but developed into impurity in a religious sense, so that it

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was not enough to have a simple wash: men and women had also to touch Ganges water or *tulsi* (basil) leaves, both of which were holy, in order to be restored to purity. The failure to do so was made a charge against Westernized young women in a Bengali satire published at the end of the last century. After a walk in the village the young lady asked her servant to take off her boots and gave him her cap. The impertinent fellow remarked: 'Does putting off things worn at the two ends make away with the sin of walking on the roads in this village? In mine they have to change altogether, wash the feet, and put Ganges water on the head.'

In Bengal elderly women became maniacs for this kind of purity. They never took a step without sprinkling the path before them with Ganges water if it was to be had, or a solution of cow-dung and water from a pot which they carried in their left hand and from which they scooped out the liquid with the right. Cow-dung, it must be explained, purified everything, while buffalo or horse dung did not, though they were herbivorous. The excreta of flesh-eating animals were abominably impure, and that of the omnivorous humans even more so. Even the faeces of strict vegetarians were regarded as impure. In south India a twice-born person became contaminated if he trod on the shadow of an untouchable in the streets. When one of the latter walked along, he kept shouting: 'I am an untouchable, I am an untouchable', so that the twice-born might not come too near him.

A house or a room became impure in a wide variety of circumstances. To mention one contingency, which must have been rare, if a dog died in a room—most likely to be the kitchen where it might go to steal food and be beaten to death—all the utensils had to be taken out, scrubbed with cow dung, sniffed at by a goat, and then washed with water sanctified by *mantras*, and with some gold and kusha grass in it. (This is taken from Smarta Raghunandana's *Vyavastharnava, Ocean of Directions.*)

Next, a room became impure if death of a human being took place in it. If a man of the Sudra caste died in a Brahmin's room it could become pure again only after a month; if a dog died, after ten nights; if a man who had lost his caste died, after two months; if a Mlechchha (unclean foreigner, e.g. an Englishman) died, after four months. But if a Chandala (untouchable) died the house or hut had to be abandoned. A room was made impure by any death. When a room was contaminated by a corpse, all

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earthenware and cooked food in it had to be thrown away. Therefore all dying persons were removed from any roofed-in place and taken out in the open to die.[1]

Rooms also became impure if childbirth took place in them, and anyone who went into such a room had to put off his clothes and take a bath before he could go to other rooms or touch another person. No wonder that a temporary shed was often built for childbirth. Equally impure was the period of menstruation, and a woman in her monthly periods had to go to a shed at one end of the courtyard, and sit and sleep on a mat until she was clean again. In consequence most Hindu women suffered from all sorts of puerperal infections.

The human body and clothes were, of course, more susceptible to impurity than anything else. After taking food, as was and still is customary, with the *right* hand, a person had to wash that hand thoroughly. After excreting, both the orifices had to be washed, and the anus very thoroughly with the *left* hand. For decontaminating that hand it had to be rubbed many times on the ground or with mud, and then washed. Even so it was never used for eating anything.[2] The mouth was the most sensitive part of the body in regard to contamination. It both communicated impurity and became impure easily. It was impure *per se*, and remained so despite any washing. Therefore kissing was a very risky exhibition of love. A high-caste woman who would allow a low-caste paramour (normally the manservant) to have sexual intercourse with her, would not allow him to kiss her.

Touching any kind of cooked food made one contaminated, but uncooked foodstuffs did not, nor did anything cooked in ghee. Clothes, earthen vessels, including china, and glass were conductors of impurity. So if anyone drank anything from such a vessel, the hand in which it was held became contaminated and had to be washed. Clothing of all kinds, particularly if made of cotton, became very easily impure. Especially, those worn in bed had (and still have) to be put off by the women before they could go into the kitchen to cook or supervise cooking. They had also to

[1] One of my great-aunts was taken out under a mistaken impression that she was dead, and when she made a sound in the yard, everybody was shocked and wanted to take her back. She firmly resisted, and died after a few days.

[2] The Abbé Dubois sets down twenty-three rules which have to be observed by a Hindu when answering calls of nature. Dubois (1897), pp. 239–42.

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take a bath. Many strict women washed even the quilts they used in the cold season every morning.

It has to be pointed out that the notion of impurity had a special connection with the liquid state of material bodies. The gaseous and solid states were not so contaminating. Dust and sand were even considered as cleansing mediums when no water was available. But among all the liquids bodily secretions like saliva, semen, urine, or faeces (which are necessarily viscous in India) were specially impure. So was blood, more particularly menstrual blood. The main reason which made overnight clothing taboo (but of which the women were not conscious) was of course marital relations at night. Even unmarried girls and grown-up women who were away from their husbands had to change because they might have had lascivious dreams and emitted secretions.

Certain periods and times also became impure for other than celestial reasons. For example, both after birth and death a house and a whole family remained impure for specified periods, and no one outside the family ate or drank at the houses. If anyone did he also became impure. The period varied according to caste, the longest spells of impurity being for the lowest castes.

So, in fixing dates for weddings, which could not take place during the period of impurity for birth as well as death among relatives within seven degrees of consanguinity, special care was taken. Deaths could not be anticipated of course, but note was taken of all the pregnancies of women among those of seven degrees of consanguinity. Such a taboo necessarily resulted in subterfuges. It was assumed that no wrong was done if the parties remained ignorant of a birth or a death. Therefore relatives living at a distance never gave news of birth or death to another relative who was going to have a wedding in the family.

Events of Life

A people who had brought religion into its day-to-day life in this manner could not possibly leave the most important events of a man or woman's life free from its control and sanction, uninvested with its consecration. Thus they made all these events, e.g. conception, birth, coming of age, marriage, and death, as well as many other occasions which other societies look upon as purely secular, subject to religion.

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The rituals concerned with these began with conception, from which the Hindus reckoned their age. For religious purposes age was counted from the assumed date for it; that is to say, the whole period of pregnancy of the mother (conventionally given as ten lunar months and ten days) was added to the age from the date of birth.

In recent times the conception ceremony was performed only after the first menstruation of the girl. As long as child marriage was the universal custom this took place, of course, years after the wedding. But when due to economic reasons marriage of the girls began to be delayed till after puberty, the first menstruation after marriage was politely regarded as the first one. Sometimes, to save appearances, a few periods were even allowed to be overlooked.

In old times the ceremony was an occasion of considerable pomp and publicity, and as in all religious worship it was accompanied by music of the usual noisy kind, i.e. beating of drums and gongs, clanging of cymbals, and blowing of pipes. There was a strictly religious part of the ceremony which was conducted with great solemnity by the priest. Incantations were uttered, and the young man's genitals were touched to give them potency. But this was done very decorously, as a matter of mere form, and since nobody understood what was being said in Sanskrit there was no embarrassment.

But the ritual had also a non-religious festive side under the management of the women in which there was no pretence at reserve. The Hindu code of social behaviour enjoins the utmost modesty on women but also wisely makes an exception by saying that *lajja* (modesty, shame, bashfulness) is no adornment in sexual behaviour. Therefore the women treated the occasion of a conception ceremony, which was called *garbhadhana* (bringing about pregnancy), as one in which sexual behaviour could be exhibited vicariously, and so they indulged in a good deal of ribaldry and horseplay, throwing mud at each other. There was so much of it that the ceremony could be regarded as a saturnalia for the women.[1]

[1] In 1964 or thereabouts my wife and I, and about one hundred other guests, attended the ceremony of first menstruation of the daughter of an Indian member of the French Embassy in Delhi. It was performed in the grounds of the Embassy itself. The father was a Tamil Roman Catholic Christian. But whatever his religion in the strict sense he had not shaken off the control of worldly life by Hinduism.

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During the period of pregnancy there were four formal ceremonies which had to be performed in the third, fifth, sixth or eighth, and ninth month. The special desires of the woman, especially in regard to food, were attended to. The last ceremony was even called the 'fulfilment of wishes', at which rice-pudding was ceremonially given to the expectant mother. I myself have seen a grown-up married son with children of his own, holding this ceremony for his mother. This was possible in the days of child marriage when a woman could become a grandmother on the daughter's side before she was thirty.

The birth of a child was the occasion for other religious ceremonies, both for the mother and the child, and both purificatory and propitiatory. The first of these was held on the sixth day after birth, when a name was provisionally given to the child. The mother came out of the confinement room to be purified on the next day, and a more elaborate ceremony for ending the period of impurity was held later, the day being determined by the caste of the family.

Then followed, year by year, the rituals connected with the male child's progress towards manhood. The first of these, the ceremony of taking solid food for the first time, was also for the little girls. Before it was performed no child could take anything but milk, and the time for it could be any month from the fifth till the ninth according to convenience. Since Hindu children were kept at the breast till they were even two years old the first taste of solid food was only a permissive rite. In the ceremony there was a banquet for the relatives and gifts for the child, which were mostly gold ornaments. Both boys and girls wore them, and I myself had both bangles and a necklace of gold and wore them till I was about five years old, and afterwards took them out of my mother's jewel box and looked at them for my satisfaction for some years. The child was given another and his final name at this ceremony. The real name of the child was always kept secret, for fear of being used by enemies for harming him by black magic.

Teething was not a religious ceremony. But it was watched as an omen. If a boy was born with teeth, both the parents were bound to die. If the teeth came out in the first month the father only was to die, in the second the mother, and in the third the brother. After that good and bad alternated, but if the teeth came out in the tenth month the child itself died. The harmful results of

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teething could be counteracted by appropriate rites, and by feeding Brahmins and making gifts of money to them according to capacity.

The twice-born had to get their ears pierced, and have a formal tying of the tuft of hair at appropriate months. Starting to read or write was also the occasion for a religious ceremony. The initiation was a very important and obligatory ceremony for the twice-born. Strictly, it had to be in the eighth year for the Brahmin boy, in the eleventh for the Kshatriya, in the twelfth for the Vaisya. However, in recent times these ages have not been strictly adhered to. The ceremony is very arduous, and in my young days my Brahmin playfellows looked forward to it with terror as well as pride. It is performed in strict accordance with the procedure laid down in the sacred scriptures for the stage of life called *Brahmacharya*. The boys had their head shaved, put on the correct clothes, carried a staff, and ate only the permitted food. For some reason or other if there was any rumble of clouds during the ceremony it was spoilt, and had to be done over again. Marriage was a sacrament and had very solemn rites, and the funeral rites were equally solemn. They are so elaborate that a whole chapter could be written about them, all to themselves alone.

As explained, I have given the rules for worldly life very largely as they were and still are in Bengal. But in their broad features they are the same all over India, though every region has its special customs which are regarded as valid in spite of the absence of scriptural authority.

The details I have given in this chapter are likely to raise a smile among Western readers, even among those who treat the absurdities of Tantra and even its obscenities with a more-than-absurd solemnity. Hinduism is, however, indivisible, and in its requirements for salvation it expects its injunctions about all actions to be taken as seriously as the directions about sexual intercourse with one's mother, as is to be found in Tantra. The Western idiot who seeks salvation *à la hindoue* has no right to be disrespectful towards the rules for defecating and urinating *à la hindoue*.

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PART THREE

ANALYTICAL

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Chapter One

SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF HINDUISM

IN this part of the book I am going to offer a detailed treatment of a number of important features of the Hindu religion which were dealt with in a general way or only referred to in the previous parts. My aim in the first instance is to make the reader more fully acquainted with the content of the religion, at all events with the most widely practised parts of it. But no less is it my intention to imbue the reader with its spirit, so that he might realize that Hinduism is as peculiar in the emotions it evokes or satisfies as it is in its beliefs and rites. The reader should be made to feel its presence in flesh and blood, so to speak. Thus this part of the book will give an account of the three great cults of Siva, the Mother-Goddess (Durga-Kali), and Vishnu-Krishna as fully as the scale of the book will permit, and it will also describe what the Hindus get from their religion.

But before that can be done, it is necessary to consider three special features found in Hinduism. This is necessary for a proper understanding of what follows, and besides even these will illustrate its peculiar spirit. Much of the existing misunderstanding of the religion has been due to the fact that these features have not been given due weight.

I have to give another explanation about what will be found in this and two of the chapters which follow. In discussing the topics contained in them I have been compelled to be very frank. This compulsion comes from the simple claim of truth. Hinduism has been the victim of both moral and intellectual dishonesty. On the one hand, there have been people who have gone to Hinduism from certain motives, but have never had the courage to avow them. They have camouflaged their motives in rigmarole. This is specially true of the present age. On the other hand, there have been others who have suppressed these very aspects, always refusing to take them for what they really are. Both groups have offered explanations for them which if they are not due to ignorance, can only be set down to hypocrisy.

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Now, the difficulty in meeting this hypocrisy lies in the scruples many scholarly writers on Hinduism feel to set forth without bowdlerizing the evidence provided by the basic texts or commentaries, on the score of what would be regarded as indecency. Unfortunately, those who are hypocritical about Hinduism have always reckoned on the decency of honest writers, which, they have felt, would prevent their exposure by citing the more outspoken passages bearing on the points. I have not given them this advantage by embarrassing myself with this false delicacy.

The Hindu Word

The first of the three features which have to be considered in this chapter is the nature of the Hindu word about the religion. All scholars make use of the Hindu basic and exegetical texts without considering how far they can be utilized to give a rational view of Hindu religious beliefs and practices.

The very first difficulty arises from the nature of the Sanskrit language. There is an impression among those who want to learn the language that its grammar is difficult, both in accidence and syntax. It is not, and anyone with a good memory can learn the elaborate declensions and conjugations in six months. Sanskrit syntax is also for the most part a matter of arbitrary rules, and can be memorized. The real difficulty in Sanskrit is over the meaning of words. Ancient Sanskrit lexicography was never good, and the modern is also very unsatisfactory. So one can never be sure what a word means in a particular context.

This was perceived even before the eleventh century by the great Muslim scholar Alberuni, who had learnt the language. Thus he said in his famous book *Indica*, in which he gave an account of the religious and philosophical ideas of the Hindus:

> The language (Sanskrit) is of an enormous range, both in words and in inflexions, something like the Arabic, calling one and the same thing by various names, both original and derived, and using one and the same word for a variety of subjects, which in order to be properly understood, must be distinguished from each other by various qualifying epithets. For nobody could distinguish between the various meanings of a word unless he understood the context in which it occurred, and its relation both to the following and preceding parts of the sentence.

Modern lexicographers of Sanskrit, both Indian and Western,

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have not as yet produced any dictionary which can be considered to be adequate, especially in regard to religious texts. There is besides a special defect of the modern dictionaries due to the fact that a very large number of words in classical Sanskrit are to be found in all modern Indian Sanskritic languages, in which they are wholly unaltered in form. But these words are often used in meanings which are different from the ancient, and they also have different meanings in different modern Indian languages. All modern Sanskrit dictionaries are coloured by local or provincial usages, and one can never be sure that these correspond to ancient usage and meaning.

Next, difficulty springs from the fact that most of the texts are in verse, and for the sake of metre different words have to be used for the same meaning, and also many superfluous words or particles have to be introduced. This was also referred to by Alberuni. After explaining that verse was employed by the Hindus to facilitate memorizing, he observed: 'Now it is well known that in all metrical compositions there is much misty and constrained phraseology merely intended to fill up the metre and serving as a kind of patchwork, and this necessitates a certain amount of verbosity.'

But besides this linguistic difficulty in the way of interpreting any religious text in Sanskrit, there is the whole Hindu attitude to language. From the very beginning of their speculations the Hindus exhibited a deep reverence for the Word *per se*. This was certainly descended from the original wonder of man at the dawn of his mental awakening when he considered the phenomenon of language. Among the Greeks this created the doctrine of the *Logos*. The Hindus equally had their doctrine of the Word. In the *Satapatha Brahmana*, one of the ritualistic treatises considered to be revealed, it is stated: 'The Word is imperishable, the first-born of the cosmic order, mother of the Vedas, and the centre of the deathless condition.' But for the Hindus the Word is not the *Logos* of the Greeks, Romans, and Christians, who identified *Logos* with the reason immanent in the cosmos. With them it is just word, speech as uttered or embodied in writing. This led the Hindus to create a world of words parallel to and co-existent with the world in which they lived and carried on their activities. Thus for them the universe became a space-time-word continuum, instead of being only a space-time continuum.

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This peculiar disposition to speak and write without any relation to what existed objectively in the world and what could influence their actions is seen even in the practical treatises of the Hindus. All of them are padded with theoretical and even fanciful notions which have no relation to the practical instructions given, and, besides, they indulge in a systematization which is thorough to the point of absurdity. But those who went to these treatises for practical purposes could always separate the theories from the directions. On the other hand, even some of the authors of the treatises had the good sense to recognize that practice could be different from their injunctions. For instance, the author of the *Kama Sutra*, who indulges in a grotesque systematization of every activity connected with sexual intercourse and also lays down a rigid order of execution, nevertheless observed: 'The directions of the Sastras [scriptures] apply only so long as sexual excitement remains weak in men and women. When once the cycle of sexual intercourse has begun there is neither Sastra nor sequence.' Of course, this good sense was only the recognition of the obvious, which is the last thing a Hindu theorist will voluntarily do.

But theorizing without any regard for what existed or was done could be wholly merciless in those spheres of human activity which existed in the mind. Thus Hindu philosophy, Sanskrit literature, and the Hindu religion, all were seized by the Hindu theorists as the subjects on which to practise their hair-splitting and systematization. In philosophy, however, this did very little harm, for it permitted a wide gamut of discussion varying from stimulating thought to arid word-mongering. It had, however, a disastrous effect on Sanskrit literature. The Hindu literary theorists virtually killed it.

Sanskrit rhetoric and poetics—*Alamkara* or *Rasa Sastra* as these were called—were as pretentious as they were arid. They divided the heroes and heroines of literary works into types in an elaborate taxonomy, and reduced their states of amorousness to ridiculous abstractions. If the rules laid down in these treatises had existed in the early and creative age of Sanskrit literature, neither Kalidasa nor Bhavabhuti could have written anything. The only service that these rhetoricians and analysts rendered to Sanskrit literature was by preserving as illustrations to their categories some gems of lyric poetry, which otherwise might have been lost. Their writings gave Sanskrit literature a bad name as a collection of mere artificial prettinesses and far-fetched conceits.

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In religion the theorizing and the practice remained largely independent, and religious life had enough vitality not to be petrified by the empty metaphysics or theology of the Hindu pundits. In recent times the learned men who concerned themselves with theoretical discussions carried on their analysis and interpretation with the object of asserting their professional eminence and asserting their superiority over other exegetists. The commentators as a body hold only a subsidiary place in the literature of Hinduism.

Naturally, Hindu religious literature has an immense volume. Once a species has been created in it, it goes on proliferating itself by means of variations which are not less extensive than those found in the animal world. Only the Vedas remained confined to four, but that probably was due to the fact that they were regarded as inherited heirlooms, and so had to be necessarily limited and kept apart from the acquired wealth in India. In any case, their small number was compensated for by the doctrine that they contained everything that followed. Even at the next stage of the revealed scriptures, Brahmana followed Brahmana, Aranyaka followed Aranyaka, Upanishad followed Upanishad until there was even an *Allah Upanishad*. The Hindus never discriminated among these, and it is only Western scholars who have considered ten, eleven, or thirteen Upanishads to be authentic and the rest spurious. Furthermore, when an eponymous author has been found for an original work, those which follow in the same genre or even other genres must have the same name. For example, Veda Vyasa is the compiler or arranger of the Vedas, and he is also the writer of the *Mahabharata* and of many Puranas. The proliferation in the non-Vedic literature is far greater.

Hindu religious literature falls into groups whose value for a student of Hinduism varies. In the first group are the scriptures considered as revealed. A number of books in this class are products of religious feeling and even exultation, while the others are concerned with rituals. What intellectual discussion these contain is extremely crude, being founded on false physics and false biology. It is futile to seek any rational meaning in it. But as expressions of the religious feeling of the Hindus these have to be read.

The largest part of the Hindu religious literature is taken up with mythology, and the most important works in this class are the Puranas, or treatises on old times. These are composed in Sanskrit

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verse, but possess no poetic merit. For that one has to go to Sanskrit literature in its truly literary genres, to which many Puranic stories furnish the themes. The Puranas are as entertaining as the *Arabian Nights* in their mythological stories. If, however, anyone tries to extract a consistent account of the gods and of their character and activities from them he will be baffled at every point by their inconsistencies and exuberance.

The third group of Hindu religious literature is constituted by the devotional books of which the *Gita* is the most outstanding. They shed full light on the character of Hindu religious sentiment. Many of them also contain a greater or lesser amount of metaphysical and theological discussion. In that aspect the devotional books should be classed with the next category.

This group contains the exegetical literature properly so-called, and the books in it are mostly commentaries on well-known texts of an older epoch. These commentaries offer quasi-philosophical and quasi-theological interpretations of the cults and beliefs, and as a rule are either pedestrian or meaningless. In connection with the erotic elements in the religious life of the Hindus they hold forth some very unpleasant rigmarole, about which more will be said later. These are of no use in discovering the exact nature of the Hindu religious ideas, because any interpretation might be put upon them. To try to analyse the statements of the commentators and determine their meaning would be a futile attempt to make what is basically irrational, rationally intelligible.

Therefore I have not drawn on the commentators to offer my interpretation of the religious ideas of the Hindus. But their statements can be put to use for a different purpose, that is to say, for illustrating the working of the Hindu mind when it has considered religion intellectually. One cannot describe Hinduism scientifically from the Hindu word about it. The exegesis pursues a course of its own in a world of mere words. It is a prolix exercise in word-mongering.

Mythology, Cults, and Devotion

The second feature which has to be considered is Hindu mythology. Even at the risk of being considered paradoxical and even eccentric, I must say that Hindu mythology has been the most serious obstacle in the way of understanding Hinduism as a

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religion. It has become a fixed habit even with modern Hindus to equate their mythology with their religion, and thus present those who want to attack it with a very vulnerable target. This is due to the fact that Hindu mythology is even worse than the Greek and Roman in respect of the morals of the gods and goddesses, and therefore the critics have been able to point to their doings and say that a religion which prescribes the worship of such gods must be very degraded.

The mythology of Siva and Durga is not as well known as the legends of Krishna, and so those who wanted to demonstrate the immorality of Hinduism, drew upon the stories of Krishna's affairs with the gopis (milkmaids, or rather, the wives of the milkmen). Nowadays, in the West, these very stories have become the main attraction of Hinduism to a certain class of people. But both the attitudes are wrong, because Hindu mythology and Hindu religion are essentially different things.

The relationship between Hindu mythology, cults, and devotion is extremely complex. At times they seem to coincide, but most often they do not, and remain independent of one another. That is to say, the cults do not follow the mythology, and the devotion disregards both mythology and cult.

The fact has to be faced that appearances are all against such a separation of the three. There is first the iconography which exhibits the violent traits of the deities and to a lesser extent also the erotic. Next, at the seasonal festivals the mythological books are always read, and their stories expounded. Thirdly, the celebrations exhibit not only extravagant emotionalism, but also orgiastic behaviour. Very erotic songs are sung, and dancing when it is seen has erotic suggestions. At the same time these violent and erotic features make no pretence to be symbolic. They have simply to be taken for what they undisguisedly are. All this makes it extremely difficult for any outside observer to perceive that the true religious sentiment of the Hindus is independent of mythology, and that it remains a thing apart from the violence or eroticism of the mythology. This has to be brought out clearly.

To begin with, it should be pointed out that the separation of religious feeling from mythology is not exclusive to Hinduism. It was a feature of all Indo-European religions, and more especially of Greek and Roman religions. To illustrate this I shall give only one example, that of Zeus. It is unnecessary to list all his amorous

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adventures. One of these alone, his seduction of Leda in the form of a swan, became one of the stock erotic themes in classical as well as Renaissance art.

Nevertheless, the Zeus of mythology is not the Zeus of the cult, whether at Olympia or elsewhere. He is not the Zeus of even the poets, of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides. And he is not the Zeus of the philosophers. The difference can be best judged from the famous hymn to Zeus composed by the Stoic philosopher, Cleanthes (*c.* 331–232 B.C.). He begins his hymn by addressing Zeus as 'The most glorious of Immortals, under a thousand names Omnipotent for ever, O Zeus, Lord of Nature, who governs all things in accordance with law', and closes the hymn with the following prayer:

> O Zeus, universal benefactor, god of dark clouds, the Thunderer! Save men from their fatal ignorance. Dispel it, O Father, far from their heart; and grant it that they arrive at the thought which guides Thee to govern all with justice, so that honoured by you we render honour to you, singing of your works without ceasing, as is proper in a mortal, because neither for men nor for gods is there a greater privilege than to sing for ever and ever, in the form of justice, of the Universal Law.

Even Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love, does not remain the goddess of seduction and rape she is in Homer. She becomes different in the hands of Aeschylus and Euripides. The latter connects her with wisdom. Even in the age of decadence of Greek literature, the idyllic joy in her cult is given expression in the fifteenth idyll of Theocritus.

Thus, in keeping mythology and religion separate, the Hindus were keeping company with the Greeks and the Romans. But the manner in which they did so was very individual, because they made their devotion more passionate and their mythology more sensual. Not less individual is the persistent intrusion of mythology into worship, and the insulation of devotion from its sensuality. The extremely complex relationship between Hindu mythology, cults, and devotion in connection with the worship of Siva, Krishna, and Durga has to be described. Here I take up only the worship of Siva.

The relationship of mythology and devotion, with its twofold aspect of association and dissociation, can be illustrated by

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quoting many hymns to Siva, which are of the type of the hymn to Zeus of Cleanthes, and setting them against the stories as they are related in the Puranas. But I think the best way to bring out the strangeness of the phenomenon is to take a writer who shows devotion to the monotheistic Siva and at the same time writes at length about the mythological Siva. As it happens, such a writer is present in the person of Kalidasa, the greatest poet of ancient India. He was a Saiva, and therefore invoked the god in the prologues to his works. I shall quote two of them, from the epic poem *Raghuvamsa*, and the play *Sakuntala*.

In the first he prays to Siva and Parvati in the following words: 'I bow to the parents of the world, Parvati and Paramesvara (Great Lord), who are as united with each other as is the word with its meaning, so that I may achieve meaning for my words.'

In *Sakuntala*, he says: 'May that Lord protect us who is made perceptible to the senses by means of eight tangible manifestations: (1) water which is the first creation of the Creator; (2) the sacrifice and (3) the sacrificer; (4) the sun and (5) the moon who determine time; (6) the ether which pervades the universe as the carrier of sound; (7) the earth which generates seeds; and (8) the air by which all creatures live.'

But Kalidasa also composed a long epic poem in which he gave literary expression to the mythological story of the marriage of Siva and Parvati and of the birth of their son Kartikeya, the war god of the Hindu pantheon. Its title is *Kumara-Sambhava*.

In it the story unfolds as follows: the gods headed by Indra are greatly troubled by their enemies, the demons, and they will be saved if only Siva will marry and procreate a son to fight the demons. Yet after the death of his first wife, Sati, the daughter of Daksha Prajapati, he has fallen into meditation on the Himalayas and will not be roused from it. In the meanwhile, Parvati or Uma,[1] the daughter of the Himalaya Mountain, has fallen in love with him and wishes him to be her husband. The gods think that if she presents herself to him in all her beauty and with all her adornments he will abandon his meditation. To break it, they

[1] Siva's second wife was the daughter of the personified Himalayas, and was therefore given the name of Parvati, i.e. the daughter of *Parvata* or Mountain. But her personal name as a maiden was Uma. The exact meaning of the name is not known and even Kalidasa gave a fanciful explanation.

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send the god of love, Madana, with Uma, to shoot his arrow into Siva. As Uma stands before Siva, he does so. Awakened by the shaft, Siva feels a strange excitement which he cannot explain. Then he sees Madana, and in his wrath shoots out a flame from the third eye on his forehead, and reduces him to ashes.

Uma goes back in deep mortification, with a sense of intolerable humiliation. She resolves to abandon her bodily appeal and womanly blandishments and undergo severe self-mortification as a penance and thus make herself deserving of Siva. She puts off her robes and ornaments and goes into a garment of tree-barks in order to carry on her penance under rain and snow. After she had done so for a long time, Siva himself comes to her in the disguise of a hermit to dissuade her from it. This dialogue is one of the most moving in Sanskrit literature. But Uma remains steadfast, and at last Siva is pleased with her, and he shows himself ready to marry her.

Up to this point, Kalidasa deals with the mythological story of Siva and Parvati in a spirit which is indeed different from that which he shows in his invocations, but which can be said to have represented the whole episode as a triumph of Aphrodite Urania over Aphrodite Pandemos. But after describing how devotion and austerities brought about the marriage of Siva and Parvati and thus achieved what the arrows of Cupid could not, Kalidasa makes a staggering *volte face*, and in the eighth canto of the poem describes their sexual enjoyments with a frankness and gusto which is not surpassed even by Casanova. If one has to understand Hinduism such acrobatics of the mind have to be faced squarely. I shall give the details because without them the distance that separates Hindu mythology from Hindu devotion cannot be correctly measured, and to omit them would be to imitate the deplorable habit of suppressing the truth which the modern expositors of Hinduism have acquired.

During the first month after the wedding Siva leads Parvati step by step and with extreme patience into a whole-hearted enjoyment of sexual intercourse and makes her skilled in it. The description is elaborate and leisurely:

At first Parvati would not reply when spoken to, would wish to go away even when held by her sari, and when in bed would keep her face turned away. Yet Siva was pleased with her. He pretended to be asleep and out of curiosity Parvati looked at his

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face, but when he opened his eyes and smiled, she shut her own eyes as if dazzled by lightning.

When Siva placed his hand in the region of her navel she pushed it away with her trembling hand, but her sari slipped off and her girdle got loose, both of themselves. Though told by her companions to serve Siva in private without fear, when face to face with him, she forgot their instructions in her flurry.

When robbed of her sari, she covered the eyes of Siva with her two hands, but he could see everything with the third eye on his forehead, and this failure chagrined her.

Siva felt disappointed that he could not bite her lips when kissing, or could not squeeze her breasts but had to embrace her gently; even so, frustrated though he was in his desire, he was pleased with a bride's coitus with its unavoidable inadequacies. Parvati, too, learned to tolerate coitus by her kind beloved, which was free of biting and scratching.

Though she could not tell the story of the night to her companions out of bashfulness she felt eager in her heart to do so. She made many gestures of bashfulness when she saw herself in the mirror with the signs which enjoyment had left on her face. Her mother too felt happy to see the youth of her daughter enjoyed by Siva.

After some days of coitus with Siva Parvati slowly learned to take pleasure in it, and abandoned her fear of it. So she embraced her beloved when he wanted to be pressed to the breast, did not deprive him of her mouth, and when he lovingly put his hand on her girdle did not check him firmly.

At last she gave back to Siva, as fees to a teacher, all the skills befitting a young woman which she had learnt by receiving lessons on coitus from him in private by becoming his pupil.[1]

After this Siva took her away on a honeymoon to many beauty spots, and took up his sojourn on the hills of Gandhamadana in the south. He stayed there for a long time, and one day he made Parvati drunk with wine. He felt very pleased to find her faltering in speech, rolling her eyes, and free from bashfulness. So he carried her into the bedroom, and placed her on a bed covered with a sheet which was as white as the plumage of a swan.

[1] Cf. Casanova's remark about Hedvige and Hélène: 'Mes leçons avaient fructifié, et mes deux élèves étaient passées maîtresses dans l'art de goûter et de communiquer le bonheur.'

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There she had coitus with him of such violence, accompanied by such defiance and scratching, that her coiffure came loose, the sandal paste on her breasts was rubbed off, and the girdle torn. Still Siva was not satiated with her coitus. Only when the stars were sinking below the horizon, out of sheer pity for her, he clasped her to his breast, and deigned to close his eyes. But soon the couple were awakened by the morning song of the minstrel. At that moment Siva's eyes were so charmed by the rows of nail marks on her groins that he forbade Parvati to put on her slackened sari. He was roused and pleased by looking at the face of his beloved, with the eyes reddened by loss of sleep, lips wounded by deep bites, hair all dishevelled, and the vermilion mark on the forehead rubbed off. So he would not leave the bed marked by the red paint on Parvati's feet, with her girdle lying on it in a coil and the bedsheet tumbled.[1] Yet it was day. Thus he stayed on the Gandhamadana hills for a hundred days in continuous coitus with Parvati, and they seemed but one night to him. Still, his desire blazed like fire under the sea.

In the meanwhile, the gods had become very anxious at the delay in procreating their war god. They waited anxiously outside and sent messages through Parvati's handmaiden Vijaya, but Siva would not listen. At last in their desperation, they decided to send in one of themselves, Agni, the Fire God, to remind him of what was expected of him. Agni dared not go in his own form for fear of provoking the wrath of Siva by interrupting his coitus, and took the form of a pigeon. He danced round them bowing, and imitating Parvati's murmurs of pleasure with his cooing.

However, Siva recognized him and flew into a rage, at which Agni resumed his own form, gave his message, and implored forgiveness. Mollified but embarrassed, Siva withdrew his member

[1] In such matters Kalidasa does not make any distinction between gods and men, nor does any other Sanskrit poet. What is said here by him about Siva is paralleled in the nineteenth canto of *Raghuvamsa* in the descriptions of the sexual orgies of King Agnivarna. Kalidasa says in Verse 25 that the various objects and stains (all of which are named) indicated the variety of coitus of the luxurious King. The commentators are more explicit. They identify each object and each stain with a particular posture. For instance, a torn girdle shows that the woman had played the man, and the red stain on the sheet from the dye of lac on her feet, that she had either taken the pose of a beast or been on top of the man. The acumen shown in such detective work is unsurpassed. More examples of it will be given.

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and the imminent orgasm took place outside. Siva dropped the semen on the body of Agni himself. Parvati on her part, infuriated by the interruption of her pleasure at its climax, cursed Agni, and said that he would for ever carry black smoke about him, and appear like a man disfigured by leprosy.

Now, all this is related by Kalidasa in the most natural manner without any awareness that there were unresolvable contradictions in his various attitudes to Siva. No rational person can reconcile them. I think that is beyond the capacity for intellectual dishonesty even of the pedlars of Hindu spirituality, Indian or Western.[1]

I shall give a second illustration of the antithesis between the Siva of devotion and Siva of mythology from a Bengali poem written in the middle of the eighteenth century by Bharata Chandra Ray. Here the Siva of devotion is not an abstraction as with Kalidasa, but has become a personal god of love, while Siva of mythology has become a rustic clown. The theme is again the marriage of Siva and Parvati.

The poet Bharata Chandra prays to Siva for himself, preceding the prayer with his praise of the god:

> O creatures! Utter the name of Siva if you would have the happiness of going to the abode of Siva.

[1] At this point it might be mentioned that later profane poetry in Sanskrit introduced erotic imagery even in the invocations or praise of the deities. I give two typical examples from the well-known collection *Arya-Saptasati* by Govardhanacharya, which concern the divine couples, Vishnu and Lakshmi and Siva and Parvati:

(1) Pratibimbita-priyā-tanu sakaustubhaṃ jayati Madhubhidc vakṣaḥ,
Puruṣāyitam'abhyasati Lakṣmīr'yadvīkṣya mukuram'iva.

(Victory to the chest of the destroyer of Madhu [Viṣnu] [adorned] with [the gem] Kaustubha, in which the figure of his beloved [Lakṣmi] is reflected, seeing which as in a mirror Lakṣmi practises coitus in the posture of man.) *Arya*: 12

(2) Unnāla-nabhi-pamke-ruha iva yenāvabhāti Śambhur'api,
Jayati puruṣāyitāyās'tadānanam Śaila-kanyāyāh.

(Victory to the face of the Daughter of the Mountain [Parvati], who is engaged in coitus in man's posture, on account of which Śambhu [Siva] too appears like Viṣnu with a lotus and its stalk rising from his navel.) *Arya*: 19. The commentator takes the trouble to explain that this simile emphasizes not only the beauty of Parvati's face, but also the slimness of her figure when engaged in this particular action sitting on the waist of Siva.

Many such instances can be given, and in Jayadeva this becomes a mannerism.

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I shall utter his name, pass through all sorrows, and overrule death with ease.
How can I praise Siva, to whom shall I compare him?
He who says 'Siva, Siva', becomes *siva* [pure and auspicious] in his body, and Siva gives him the refuge of his feet.
Show mercy, O Siva, on those who are sorrowful, take away their sins and their sufferings, and make me, Bharata, steadfast in your worship.

Nevertheless, in dealing with the god of mythology, the same Bharata Chandra makes Siva the bridegroom a grotesque fakir attended by unclean and malicious spectres. He has matted locks, his body is smeared with ashes, he wears only a stinking tiger skin kept in place by the snakes coiled round his body. The spirits who accompany him jump about, clap their hands, utter guffaws, indulge in wild horseplay, and piss (the Bengali word—*muté*—is the exact colloquial equivalent of the English word) in the wedding pavilion. All the women beat their forehead when they see such a groom for their young and beautiful Parvati.

Worse follows when Siva goes into the inner apartments to be received in due form by Parvati's mother, Menaka, and her women. Vishnu, represented as a mischievous young man, takes it into his head to play a practical joke of a very rustic kind. He calls his mount Garuda, half man and half bird of prey and the eternal enemy of all snakes, into the room. At the sight of him all the snakes on Siva's body uncoil themselves and disappear into corners, and Siva's tiger skin falls down on the floor. Seeing her son-in-law stark naked, Menaka puts out the light and runs away. The women begin to shriek. None the less, they start quarrelling in a very significant manner. One woman says to another: 'As soon as the old fellow became naked you stared at him.' The other replies in kind. Vishnu is hugely amused. Siva smiles, and even Parvati smirks.

The description of the married life of Siva and Parvati which follows has no eroticism. The two live as a poor Bengali couple, on the whole very happy but at times quarrelling with outrageous crudity of behaviour and language. Yet if he had wanted, Bharata Chandra could have given the story an erotic colouring, because he was the author of the most famous erotic poem in the Bengali language, and the book is not crude. Here, too, there is no awareness of any contradiction.

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I have now to illustrate the separation between cult and devotion so far as it exists in the worship of Siva. Iconographically, this is a phallic cult, for the god is now worshipped almost universally in his *linga* (representation of the penis), and not in anthropomorphic images. But his anthropomorphic representation, both in stone and metal, is one of the glories of Hindu sculpture. These seem to have been solely illustrations of the Siva mythology.

Now, the phallus, as it is made today in stone and can be bought in Benares, has no ambiguity whatever. It has the form of the male member very magnified, and it stands on a platform which is ritualistically called the *gauri-patta* (slab of Gauri or Parvati) but is actually a stylized representation of the vulva, and is also quite recognizable as such. Thus the combination is unnatural, for it shows the penis coming out of the vagina. This made a Bengali Freudian, a friend of mine, take the image as a symbol of infantile sexuality as it had to be before birth. To put it simply, the *linga* showed the child in the womb having sexual intercourse with his mother from the wrong side, and therefore protruding the member outside the vagina. When Freudians get hold of Hinduism they can run amuck, and of course Hinduism can be condemned, so to speak, out of its own mouth.

But not less foolish is the palaver about the fertility cult. Everybody knows that both animal and plant fertility was a concern of primitive religion, and the Hindus are not the only people to have images of the male member. In fact, compared with the enormous phalluses on the island of Delos the Hindu phallus is a puny childish thing. But whatever the survivals of the worship of the phallus found in living and civilized religions, to connect them with the fertility cult has no justification whatever. One might as well say that the Allah of Islam is the cubic black stone at Mecca. Such objects are only vestigial survivals.

Even the ancient Hindu perceived the obsolete character of such things. Rites of fertility and procreation are found in the Vedic ritualistic treatises called the Brahmanas. I give an example from the *Aitareya Brahmana*, in which the following directions for a fire sacrifice are prescribed. If in reciting the four lines of a Vedic stanza, the first two are uttered with a pause between the lines, that signifies the opening of her thighs by a woman for intercourse; and when the next two are recited in a sequence, this indicates that she has closed the thighs for the movements. Next,

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if in reciting the verses the sacrificer *(Hotṛ)* lowers his voice that means the ejaculation of semen. Again, when the principal sacrificer *(Hotṛ)* utters a verse, his second *(Adhvaryu)* goes on all fours and turns his posterior to the sacrificer, indicating that a four-footed animal is copulating and ejaculating semen; in the second movement, he stands and faces the sacrificer indicating that a biped is ejaculating semen.[1] This ensures fertility among men as well as cattle. After these gestures a woman is brought into the sacred sacrificial field and the *Hotṛ* has sexual intercourse with her publicly, so that he might recover the virility which he has lost in a year of continence for the rite. But even by the time the *Srauta Sutras* (the treatises for public sacrifices not regarded as revealed but wholly authoritative as codifications of traditions or *smriti*) were composed this kind of rite was forbidden. As the *Sankhayana Srauta Sutra* wrote: 'This is a thing belonging to ancient times, which has gone out of usage, and is not to be performed.' *(Tad etat purāṇam, utsannam, na kāryam.)*

When the ancient Hindu had himself rejected the fertility cult, it is strange that it should be dragged in for interpreting historic Hinduism. The reality of the worship of the Siva *linga* is wholly different. I have seen it from my childhood. My ancestors built a temple of Siva with three *lingas*. It came down in the great earthquake of 1897 and was in ruins in my boyhood, with the three *lingas* still in place. Every year after the immersion of the image of Durga the whole clan went in a procession to bow down before the *lingas*, though daily worship was no longer provided for them there. I have seen my aunts and other elderly women relatives make the *linga* themselves with clay for the daily worship at home, and worship it with a devotion unconnected with the image. They never thought of its material character, though they always used the word *linga*. The prayers they uttered before it were also always solemn.

Young girls in Bengal also worshipped Siva in his *linga*, so that they might deserve to have husbands who would be like Siva. In the mind of the women Siva was the ideal husband, loving and generous, and yet reverential to his wife, who gave lessons to Parvati about religion and at the same time treated her as his

[1] Parāñcam catuṣpadyāsīnam abhyāhvayate tasmāt parāñco bhūtvā catuṣpādo retaḥ siñcanti samyaṅ dvipād bhavati tasmāt samyañco bhūtvā dvipādo retaḥ siñcanti. (*Aitareya Brahmana*, 10. 6. 1–6.)

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equal. The old blessing for a good young girl was: 'May you have a husband like Siva!' In the worship of the young girls there was certainly the memory of the penance of Uma, but no knowledge whatever of the eighth canto of *Kumara-Sambhava.*

Eroticism in Religious Art

It is common knowledge that there are strong erotic elements in Hinduism as it is found in the texts. Erotic details occur even in the *Rig-Veda*, and some of them are very crude. But the eroticism is of one kind in the mythological books, and of another when found in the texts on cults. As to actual practice, it is very difficult to discover how much of it was or is actually prevalent, for the only cult which has made sexual relations between men and women part of its ritual is the Tantric form of the worship of the Mother Goddess, but no Tantric openly acknowledges his practice of them. In the Krishna cult, so far as it is devotional, certainly there is no eroticism, but in the reading and expositions of the legends of Krishna and in the festivals there is always a substratum of erotic feeling. These questions will be dealt with in the chapters devoted to the two cults. In this chapter only the significance of the erotic sculptures in the temples will be discussed. The artistic expression of the erotic element in the cults of Krishna and the Mother Goddess is part of the cults, and need not be discussed separately.

Although, generally speaking, discussion of Hinduism is not marked by a very strict regard for intellectual honesty, as I cannot emphasize enough, on no other subject connected with it is it less in evidence than about the erotic sculptures on the temples. Everybody knows that the recent interest in it is pornographic, but in writing about it, no one faces that fact and offers explanations which would be called balderdash if the innocence of the writers were above question. This is an insult to these sculptures for they are as good examples of the particular genre as any that have been produced all over the world, since the palaeolithic age. Such things are found in Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Japanese art, to mention only four national expressions, and there is no reason why they should not exist for their own sake in India among the Hindus.

They are no more startling in their frankness than are the descriptions in Sanskrit literature I have quoted, and I shall quote

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more. Anyone who has read a line of Sanskrit cannot place Hindu erotic sculpture and the erotic descriptions in literature in separate categories or assign different motives for them. The objection would be that they are found on temples. But that sort of argument would apply to literature as well, for the literary descriptions are also of the doings of the gods. Actually, the fact that they are found on temples does not give them any religious significance at all, for the simple reason that from the truly Hindu point of view, a temple is not a religious structure but the abode of a divine king, as has been already explained.

In order to understand these sculptures one should begin with the idea behind them. There is a Sanskrit treatise entitled *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana* which deals with the arts and crafts. In it there is one chapter, the forty-third, which is devoted to painting. After laying down the rules for composition and execution, the writer considers the subjects and their suitability for various rooms. Obviously, he is thinking of frescoes. In respect of the choice of subjects he shows that he considers literature and painting to be parallel artistic creations, which give expression to the same moods and emotions in their different mediums.

Now, in Sanskrit literature the whole gamut of emotions and moods which can be expressed in literature is contained within a series fixed by the Sanskrit rhetoricians. These are called *rasas*, and there are nine of them, beginning with the *adi* (the first) or *sringara rasa* (the erotic mood), and forming a series with the humorous, peaceful, affectionate, heroic, terrifying, pathetic, bewildered, and so on. All of them are legitimate in painting also, but not legitimate in all places. According to the Purana, only such pictures as give expression to the erotic, humorous, and peaceful moods are suitable for an ordinary home. But pictures expressing *all* the moods can be painted both in the royal palaces and the temples. The palaces and the temples are thus placed in one class in respect of the subjects, which, of course, implies that the temples are only considered to be palaces of a different kind.

Domestic erotic painting or sculpture in India has not survived from ancient times. But there is definite evidence of their existence in houses and palaces in Sanskrit literature. I give only one. In the *Uttara Naishadha Charita* of Sri Harsha there is an elaborate description of the palace of King Nala. In it are to be found references to two erotic representations, one a series of paintings and

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the other reliefs in sculpture. The poet says that on a wall of the inner apartments of the palace the story of Brahma's incestuous sexual intercourse with his own daughter *(Padmasamvabha-sutā-riraṃsutā)* was painted in all its sequences (Canto 18, v. 20). On another wall the gorgeousness of Indra's adultery *(pāradārika-vilāsa-vaibhavam)* with Ahalya, the wife of the sage Gautama, was carved with chisel (v. 21). The commentator explained that the intention was to excite lust *(kāmo-ddiipanārtham)*. It should be noted that the erotic themes are from Hindu mythology. But Hindu poets were not satisfied solely with making the inner apartments like those at Pompeii. They set down other erotic attractions of the royal palaces. The poet of *Naishadha Kavya* adds that in the loggias before the bedroom sparrows were always chirping, and in the pools in the courtyard below ducks and other waterfowl swam. Thus watching their mating King Nala and Queen Damayanti could feel excited for sexual intercourse. Naturally, the description of the sexual enjoyments of the two is even more elaborate than those in Kalidasa.

The erotic sculptures in temples were only an extension of these from human residences to divine residences, and since the temples were public resorts, the artistic representations could also amuse those who went to them. In sculpture the subjects found in the temples are rarely mythological, and as a rule the figures are those of ordinary men and women. Why it has become a convention to describe the women as the courtesans of the gods *(apsarasaḥ)* I cannot understand. What then are the men? In mythology these courtesans can only be the mistresses of the gods, and not a single male figure has the iconographical features of any god. Whenever the divinities are introduced in such representations their correct features are also present. Besides, anyone who knows the physical types in different parts of India will have no difficulty in recognizing in the sculptures the idealized features of each region. The faces from Khajuraho are clearly distinguishable from those at Konarak, and all conform to the local types.

Moreover, the sculptors were capable of satirizing the abuses of religion in their works. On the basement of the Chhatra-bhoga Mandapa (the fourth pavilion in a temple built to full specifications) of the great temple at Puri are to be found friezes showing Vaishnavas and Vaishnavis engaged in coitus in the most shameless manner. These were originally at Konarak and were brought

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over from there and fixed to the basement of the pavilion which was built by the Marathas in the eighteenth century. Probably they thought these were too amusing to be left unseen in the wilderness of Konarak. One thing which distinguished the Hindus before they were corrupted by a certain kind of European hypocrisy was their capacity to face all realities, and wherever possible derive pleasure from them.

Apart from that ancient Hindu poets did not feel embarrassed to combine profane erotic descriptions with religious allusions if that suited their artistic aim. Normally the mood created by one emotion could not be disturbed by the introduction of a discordant emotion, e.g.—a pathetic mood could not combine with an erotic mood or vice versa, the affectionate mood could not mix with the terrifying, and so on. Thus the lament of a queen on seeing the severed hand of her killed husband on the battlefield, in which she cries out: 'There lies the hand which removed my girdle', is condemned. But the poets would also create a clash between emotions if it were needed either to create an artistic dissonance (as sometimes in musical chords) or if the necessities of a realistic situation demanded it.

I give a very striking (almost incredible) example of this from the *Naishadha Charita* to which I have referred before. The poet is giving a circumstantial description of King Nala's coitus with his queen, Bhaimi (or Damayanti). He becomes aware from Bhaimi's appearance that she is nearing the climax before he is ready, and as that would come in the way of the pleasure from simultaneous orgasm for both, he checks her by distracting her by pointing to his own reflection on the polished wall and crying out: 'Who is there?'

But immediately afterwards he feels that he himself is nearing the climax while his queen, having been interrupted once, would necessarily require more time. So, in order to prevent his orgasm when the queen could not desire it, he contemplates the courses of the sun and the moon and checks himself. *(Naishadha Charita,* Canto 18, vv. 115–16). This is not simply a case of checking a physiological process by an intellectual exercise, but is also a religious manipulation, for the courses of the sun and the moon have a religious significance. Indeed, the commentator Narayana says that Nala could not have delayed his orgasm unless he had practised *yoga—(etena bhangyā Nalasya yogābhyaso'pi sūcitaḥ; anyena*

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tathā kartum'aśakyatvāt—by this manipulation Nala's practice of *yoga* is indicated, because such a result was not likely to be obtained by any other means).

One further illustration might be given of the readiness of the Hindus to bring erotic suggestions into their idea of temples. It comes from an inscription of A.D. 437 which records the building of a temple to the Sun god by a guild of silk weavers of Dasapura. The builders did not think it enough to give the date simply as the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Sahasya* (Paus = December–January), but embroidered on it in the manner of Sanskrit poetry, by saying that it was built—

> In that season which unites young men with their lovely mistresses; in which the sun becomes mild and the fish lie low in water; in which the light of the moon cannot be enjoyed on the roofs, nor sandal paste used as perfume; . . . in which young men obeying erotic desire, closely embrace the immense, plump, and beautiful thighs, breasts, and *mons veneris* of their beloved mistresses and are able thereby to deride frost and cold.[1]

Perhaps it would be difficult even for the most mendacious of the symbolist interpreters of Hinduism to connect such erotic leanings with the mysticism of the Upanishads. Nor is it easier on the testimony of the Hindu poets themselves to take the erotic sculptures, which only illustrated what they wrote, back to the primitive fertility cult.

These sculptures can be taken literally for what they appear to be. In them there was only the expression of a psychological preoccupation of the Hindus. Ancient Hindus did not stand in need of subterfuges. But the next step, i.e. the idea of giving material expression to the mental imagery and the acquisition of the craftsmanship for this purpose, calls for explanation. In giving it, the history of the entire material expression of Hindu culture has to be kept in mind. I have already said that this expression was the result of the impact of foreign influences and models, primarily Persian and Greek influences. The erotic sculpture with other important things takes its place among the borrowings from the Greeks. I have no doubt whatever that the idea of such a genre

[1] The appropriateness of this statement lies in the fact that in mild seasons the Hindus slept in the open on the flat roofs, and opportunities for intimate relations were offered only by the cold season. The princes and the aristocracy had separate and high roofs. But this inscription was by silk-weavers.

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of sculpture was taken from them, and it was also from them that the craftsmanship was learnt.

In the first place, Greek erotic art is much older than anything in this line produced in India. Next, the Greeks were on the borders of India and must have possessed portable works of erotic art which were common in the Hellenistic world. Bowls and other objects with mythological designs like the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo or the rape of Europa have been found in Afghanistan, and there is no improbability that vases, bowls, lecythi, terracotta figures, toilet trays, mirrors, and lamps with erotic designs were also to be seen among these Greeks.

As the Hindus have always shown an extreme readiness to adopt arts and crafts from foreigners, they must have taken over these things as well. Some fairly old terracotta erotic figures have been found in India which can bridge the gap between the disappearance of the Greeks from the Indian region and the first dated erotic sculpture in India. In any case, there is no improbability in assuming the derivation. In deciding questions of cultural borrowings, I proceed on the assumption that if close similarity can be seen between two sets of cultural products and the existence of contact can be established, the older set has to be accepted as the model of the later. In respect of the relationship between Greek erotic art and the Hindu there can be no doubt about which is earlier.[1]

[1] I shall give two examples from my early experiences to show that the addition of erotic features to religious iconography was not even noticed. Our family had the chariot of Krishna (the car of Juggernaut), which was taken out during the festival of the chariot journey *(Ratha Yatra)*. Our family idols of Radha and Krishna were put on it fully dressed. Krishna also had a charioteer, Uddhava, who was placed in front like a coachman. We had his image as well, and it was kept in one of the rooms of our house. It was made of wood, and was of the size of a boy of seven or eight. He was, of course, dressed for the occasion in the correct Bengali clothes. But the naked image quite needlessly was given human genitals, and not only that, also an immense erect penis. We often handled the image, but no one ever tittered. Such was also the case with the lion on which the Mother Goddess Durga stood fighting the demon Mahishasura. The lion very properly showed its teeth and was given the posture of attack. But it was also given genitals, and with surprising ignorance of feline anatomy it was given, not the organs of the lion, which would not have been seen, but those of a dog which are under the belly. It was *de rigueur* to show the penis protruding out of the sheath and to paint it bright scarlet. I never found anybody drawing attention to it, but there is a facetious story about it.

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Chapter Two

THE CULTS OF SIVA AND DURGA-KALI

SIVA, the Mother Goddess who is his consort and goes under the names of Parvati, Durga, Kali and many others, and Krishna are the most important objects of the religious devotion of the Hindus. In comparison with them the other gods of their polytheistic pantheon are minor. The worship of these three deities is also the most important feature of Hinduism as organized in cults. Furthermore, the cults of these three constitute the expression in three forms of what I have called the polymorphous monotheism of the Hindus, which in its turn, is the most important development in Hinduism in its transition from the prehistoric to the historic age.

As to the process of evolution of these cults, what happened in the case of Krishna can be related more or less fully, although the reasons for the very surprising transformations of his divine personality, which will be described in the next chapter, cannot be given except as conjectures. That even an account of the transformations can be given is due to the fact that the cult of Krishna originated and reached its full development in India, and the most significant part of the development took place in the historic period. But the origins and early history of the cults of Siva and Durga-Kali are very obscure. All the historic evidence which has been found in India about their existence shows them as more or less fully developed. After that no change in the conception and worship of Siva is seen, and the cult of the Mother Goddess had only one feature added to it. But that did not alter the main character of the cult. The addition remained an isolated feature.

Early History of the Cults

I shall set down only what may be conjectured about the early history of the two cults. In Hindu worship and mythology Siva and Parvati (who is worshipped both as Durga and Kali) are always associated as husband and wife, though they are worshipped

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separately. In this connected relationship both the deities certainly go back to the pre-Indian existence of the Indo-Aryans. On this point there is definite historical evidence whose significance has never been pointed out in the previous accounts of Hinduism.

As in the case of the major gods of the Vedic religion, the earliest evidence for the existence of this divine couple has been found in Asia Minor, and in the same locality, namely, the environs of Boghazköy. In fact, the evidence is more decisive, and is found in actual iconography, and not simply epigraphic mention. At Yazilikaya near Boghazköy there is a rock-cut sanctuary, in which a long procession of gods and goddesses was carved in bas-relief. This relief contains the figures of sixty-six gods and goddesses, facing each other. At the centre of the relief stand a god and goddess facing each other, and they are obviously the most important deities. Both hold in their hands special weapons and symbols. The figures are almost life-size. The god is the Hittite Storm or Weather God, and the goddess his consort. Their names as given in inscriptions are Teshub for the god and Hepat (or Hebat) for the goddess. These are not Hittite names, that is to say, the linguistic form of the names is not Indo-European. These are really Hurrian. But the deities had been fully adopted by the Hittites, and may have been Hittite gods in spite of their Hurrian names.[1]

Certainly, the prototypes of Siva and Parvati are to be seen in this Hittite divine couple. The most decisive argument in favour of this conclusion is the identity between the mounts of the Hittite god and goddess and those of Siva and Durga. Teshub stands on bulls and Hepat on a lioness, as do Siva and Durga. It is impossible that it can be mere chance coincidence that two supreme deities of two pantheons should be both husband and wife and stand on the same animals in Asia Minor and India. Besides this there are two other analogies. The Hittite deities are connected like Siva and Parvati with mountains, and Teshub stands on some minor gods of mountains. Next, the couple have a son named Sharruma, who is shown standing behind his mother on a lion and is apparently a god of war like Kartikeya. These figures date from the thirteenth century B.C., when the Mitannians were still in upper Mesopotamia.

[1] K. Bittel, R. Neumann, H. Otto, *Yazilikaya, Architektur, Felsbilder, Inschriften und Kleinfunde* (1941), in *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient Gesellschaft*, no. 61; also Bittel, *Hattusha* (1970), pp. 95–100.

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It would not be unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that the Hittite divine couple travelled from Mesopotamia to India with the Aryans in their eastward migration, and then became Siva and Durga. But how that happened is wholly unknown.

Siva as Supreme God

The line of descent none the less was not wholly obscured. In respect of Rudra of the Vedic pantheon, with whom the Siva of the later cult is certainly connected, it can be said that he bears resemblances to the Hittite Storm God. For one thing, Rudra is described as the father of the wind gods. There is also an analogy ni character. As indicated by their names, both the gods are functionally dynamic if not destructive, but both are expressly described as benign to men in their attitudes. But in explaining the emergence of the cult of Siva as a supreme god of the monotheistic type, his distant origins in Asia Minor and his existence as Rudra in the Vedic pantheon are only of formal importance, in as much as the prototypes furnished divine figures on whom the attributes of a new Siva and new Mother Goddess could be imposed.

The new Siva does not belong to the Vedic pantheon except by his formal descent. He is a new god created in India, and the mythology relating to him and his consort was created after a definite event in the history of the Aryans, namely, the rupture of relations between the Aryans who remained in Iran and those who became Indo-Aryans. An important part of the mythology of Siva and Durga rests on this conflict. The Vedic pantheon certainly existed substantially in the same form as a common pantheon of all the Aryans in Persia before the emergence of Ahura-Mazda as a monotheistic god put an end to polytheism in that country. Therefore the Vedas contain no allusions to any conflict between these two sections of the Aryans. But later mythology has as one of its main themes the story of a cyclical war between the Asuras or Danavas and the Devas, which can only be a mythological transformation of a historic conflict.

Both Siva and Durga are key figures in this conflict. But there is a difference between the roles of the two. Durga-Kali has no friendly relations with the Asuras, and is simply their killer and destroyer. In contrast, Siva plays an ambivalent part. There are clear suggestions in the epics and the mythological literature of

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the Hindus that he is in some unexplained way also a god of the Asuras and Danavas and their patron. At the same time he is also made the killer of certain Asuras, especially of one formidable Asura, Tripura. Moreover, in Hindu mythology he is the father of the warrior god of the Hindu pantheon, Kartikeya, whose exclusive function is to kill the demons.

But in this awareness of a conflict between themselves and the Persians, the Indo-Aryans must also have become familiar with the supreme monotheistic god of the Persians, and been influenced by the conception of that god. Siva as a god of the monotheistic type is obviously derived from Ahura-Mazda. This is suggested in the first instance by certain modes of referring to Siva as the supreme god. He is the only god in the polymorphous monotheism of the Hindus who is given the title of the Lord (Isvara) *par excellence*. He is given a higher status by being called Great Lord (Mahesvara). This position is not given to Vishnu-Krishna.

Now, it should be noted that whenever the Hindus added such adjectives as 'great', 'supreme', etc., to any substantive of status, that was under the influence of the Persians. For instance, a Hindu king was simply a Raja, a tribal chief, so that in recent times even a village chief was called a Raja. In fact, the common Hindu surname Ray(a), held normally by landowners, is its derivative. It should also be pointed out that Asoka, although an all-India ruler, styled himself 'Raja' and nothing else. But in imitation of the Persians great Hindu kings began to call themselves Maharaja (Great King) or Rajadhiraja (King of Kings), echoing or translating the Persian 'Kshayatiya Vajraka' and 'Kshayatiya Kshayatiyanam'. It is also significant that those who did this first and most emphatically were the kings of foreign origin who reigned over the regions bordering on Persia, e.g. the Kushans. They gave themselves the titles of Maharaja, Rajatiraja, Shahanushahi, Shaon Shao, Basileius Basileieon, Basileious Megaus, etc. In the same way, Siva came to be designated as Isvara, Mahesvara, Paramesvara, or Maha-Deva.

But there are facts of deeper significance to establish the Persian affiliation of Siva as a monotheistic god. As an object of devotion, he is not identical with Rudra of the Vedic mythology, nor with the Siva of the Puranic tradition. Furthermore, he is not the god of destruction of the Hindu trinity, nor the leader of all sorts of low demigods living in squalor. He is a high and complete god

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with attributes which were never given to any anthropomorphic Hindu god before him, and hardly even afterwards. The *Mahabharata* describes these attributes. In reply to a question by Yudisthira, Bhisma says:

> I am incapable of enunciating the attributes of the wise Mahadeva, who is ubiquitous but nowhere visible; who is the creator of Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra and their lord as well; whom all the deities from Brahma to the Pisachas worship; who transcends all natural phenomena *(Prakriti)* as well the Absolute Spirit *(Purusha)*; whom the Rishis who practise discipline and have arrived at truth contemplate; who is indestructible, supreme, the Brahman himself; who does not exist and yet exists (and so on).

This Siva is identical with the Siva whom Kalidasa invoked. In this form he is almost identical with the *Atman* of the Way of Knowledge, and yet he is a personal and anthropomorphic god. A god like him never existed before in Hinduism. The character of the devotion to him also remained exceptional. It never assimilated itself to any form of human love. It remained on the plane of divine love. In northern India the fervour in the worship of Siva declined, probably due to the rise of the competing cult of Krishna. Nevertheless, he continued to be worshipped as the god of sanctified welfare. This was the reason why the mythology and legends of Siva, as well as the popular worship of Siva based on the mythology, remained separate from the cult of Siva, the supreme god. The original character of the monotheistic devotion to him was seen in a substantially unimpaired form in the Saivism of the south.

This peculiar character of the cult makes it permissible to infer that Siva was probably the first and only god of the monotheistic Hinduism which replaced Vedic polytheism as the highest expression of the religious sentiment of the Hindus. That is to say, originally the monotheism was unitary. In fact, even in recent times the Saivas of the south maintained that Siva was the *only* supreme deity. This monotheism became polymorphous only when the idea of Siva as a monotheistic god was extended to other deities. Through that process both Vishnu-Krishna and Durga-Kali became supreme deities in their turn. Their cults were extensions of the Saiva cult. This would be perfectly consistent with the eclectic and latitudinarian inclinations of the Hindu mind.

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The Mother Goddess

Siva's consort Parvatí, known in her cults either as Durga or Kali, as well as by alternative names, has been referred to by me as the Hindu Mother Goddess, because the divine *persona* behind both the forms is one, and it is awkward to give two names in every context. But she is not a Mother Goddess of the Semitic type worshipped in Western Asia. Her character is wholly different. As the Hindu Mother Goddess, she is not a hieratic divinity, but a goddess of rulers and warriors. Re-created in Hindu mythology out of the original Hittite goddess on account of the Indo-Iranian conflict, she remained the goddess of war throughout. Beginning as the goddess who fought and killed the Asura enemies of the Devas or Hindu gods, she remained the patron goddess of conquests. It is significant that the worship of Durga with its accompanying animal sacrifices has survived only in those parts of India where Hindu rulers and the Hindu aristocracy have also survived, notably, in Rajputana, Nepal, and Bengal. Even in Bengal where many other associations gathered round the worship of Durga, it never lost its military character. As I myself saw it, the worship had as one of its final features a ceremonial presentation of weapons. As we sat on the ground, the priest came up to each of us, marked our forehead with vermilion, and touched it with one of the scimitars.[1]

It has only to be added that the idea held by some historians of Hinduism and popularized by them that the cult of the Hindu Mother Goddess was taken over from the aboriginals of India may be dismissed not only as improbable but as absurd. The reasons for which no Hindu religious belief or worship could be borrowed from the non-Aryans has already been discussed. Nor is there any evidence for such borrowings except that some aboriginals do worship the Mother Goddess. But that is a case of borrowing by them from the Hindus and bringing the cult down to their crude level. It should also be remembered as an uncontestable fact of cultural history that a basically crude or degenerate cult cannot be raised to a higher level, though a simple one can be.

[1] Having gone through it year after year, I am familiar with the spirit of the worship of Durga in all its shades in Bengal. I have described it fully in my *Autobiography*, pp. 63–73.

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The cult of the Mother Goddess in its fully developed form is found in the *Markandeya Purana*, and those parts of this Purana which describe her deeds are known popularly in Bengal as the Chandi (The Terrible One). These accounts are read regularly as a part of her worship. But the date of the book is not known. The point which should, however, be noted is that in the case of Durga-Kali, the ritual of her worship has remained in agreement with her function and activities as described in her mythology.

The historical evidence as to the emergence of the cult has been summarized in Chapter 2 of Part I. The most impressive artistic representation of Durga at a fairly early date is to be found in a splendid relief at Mahaballipuram near Madras. In it she is shown as engaged in a fight with the demon Mahisha (Buffalo), who is given the head and horns of the animal. These sculptures have been assigned to the seventh or eighth century. They show her cult to be virtually the same as I knew it in my boyhood. The sculpture of an early date at Aihole also confirms that by the eighth century the cult of Durga was fully established.

Beyond this nothing more definite can be said about the origin and development of the cult of the Mother Goddess. But once established, it has remained unchanged, and has not undergone any transformation like that which was seen in the cult of Krishna. The only addition which was made to it was the Tantric mode of worship. But this has to be regarded as a side-shoot, with no organic relationship to the open cult of the goddess, and though some Tantric mumbo-jumbo is found in the liturgy of her worship, this has nothing of the esoteric in it. This offshoot will be dealt with in its proper place.

Worship and Ritual

The Mother Goddess is one. In her divine personality no distinction is made between Durga and Kali. But the iconography and mode of worship are different. To deal with the physical appearance first, the figure of Durga, though shown as fighting with ten weapons or emblems in her ten hands and even driving her spear into the chest of the demon Mahisha, has a wholly benign expression and her face is lit up with a smile. The facial type is of the images of northern Buddhism and even as made today the face is given eyes with a pronounced slant, which makes it

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somewhat Mongoloid.[1] Her complexion as given, is also golden yellow. In addition, she is gorgeously dressed. In her *dhyana* or contemplation she is described as follows:

> *Om!* I meditate on her in the form in which she is described: she has braided hair, three eyes, and a face like the full moon; her complexion has the colour of molten gold; her eyes are beautiful; she is in her fresh youth, with beautifully set and sharp teeth, and swelling and high breasts.

Kali, on the other hand is described in these words:

> *Om!* I recall her whose complexion is that of the *bandhuka* flower, who stands on Siva the five-headed, in whose crown the moon shines like a jewel, who has a garland of human heads, who has three eyes, whose apparel is red, whose breasts are high and full like bowls, and who has her hands raised in the gesture of giving and reassuring. I bow to Kali, the beloved of Siva, whose feet are adorned with bejewelled anklets, whose hips have a bejewelled girdle, who has a pike and a thousand weapons, whose breasts are high and have sharp points, and whose crown has jewels which shower nectar.

It would be seen that the ancient Hindus were incapable of loving or worshipping any woman, divine or human, unless she not only had beautiful features but also ample feminine charms. Besides, she had to be gorgeous with splendid dresses and ornaments. Her jewellery had to jingle as much in fighting, as it did in sexual intercourse, as described in mythological stories. Even the actual appearance of Kali in her image, fierce and frowning as it was, had an extraordinary beauty, on which as a boy I often looked with fascination.

The manner of worshipping the two forms was also different. Durga was worshipped once a year in the autumn (with a duplication in the spring) in an image made for the occasion only. After the festival of worship this image was thrown into water. Her temples were very exceptional, and, so far as I know, at present there is only one at Benares. On the contrary, Kali was normally worshipped only in permanent temples, of which the

[1] As a boy I was given the mould from which the face of Durga was made by the potter who made our image, and I often made one myself in clay. The fineness of the features showed that the original of the mould was first made many centuries ago.

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most holy and important is that at Kalighat in Calcutta, and an equally holy one at Kamrup in Assam. In Bengal every village and every town has a Kali temple, and wherever the Bengalis go they build a temple to the goddess. There are two in Delhi. But Kali is also worshipped by the Bengalis once a year in a clay image made for a special occasion; her worship falls on the day of the new moon following the worship of Durga. This image is also thrown into water.

I shall describe here how her image is infused with life. The ceremony begins with the recital of the famous *Purusha Sukta* of the tenth Mandala of the *Rig-Veda*, to the accompaniment of which the image is bathed. This is a very elaborate affair, though symbolic rather than literal. Then she is given eyesight. Lamp-black paste is taken at the end of a blade of grass and it is put on the lids of the image. After that the image is given life. Grass and flowers are taken by the priest in his right hand, which is placed on the head of the image, then he has to utter the basic incantation *(mula-mantra)* one hundred and eight times, touch other limbs and last of all place his thumb on the heart of the image and utter a Vedic incantation so that life may come into her and remain in the image. Again, he has to place his hand on her heart and utter a Vedic *mantra*, which ends thus: '*Om*, may Vishnu endow you with genitals, Tvasta carve the form, Prajapati inject semen, and Dhata make you pregnant.' All this is wound up with the recitation of the most holy formula in the Vedas, the Gayatri *mantra*.

Devotion to Durga and Kali

Personal devotion to both Durga and Kali, however, had no relation to their mythology or ritual, and its aspect must now be considered. As to the image of Durga no attention was paid to her warlike posture and role, and only her beauty and splendour were admired. Even the naked image of Kali raised no feeling which was not reverential. A devout old gentleman would stand before her image with folded hands and say, 'O unclad Mother mine!' I myself used to sing two songs of devotion which referred to her nakedness. The first ran like this: 'O Kali, why do you roam about naked?' The second song was more elaborate:

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O Mother mine, Daughter of the Mountain![1]

Why are you clad like this?
You have put your feet on the body of a god,
and you have no trace of shame,
you have placed your feet on Hara,
you are naked and wear no covering,
your tongue is lolling out and flicking,
your long hair is flowing loose.

But, O terrible wife of Siva, you are chewing the flesh
in your hand for the sake of saving this world . . .

As to Durga, even after looking on that blood sacrifice we sat down and sang songs of devotion of a different kind altogether. As I have written in my autobiography:

When about an hour after the sacrifice we sat down to chant the praise of the goddess in chorus the mood had miraculously changed. My old uncle gave the word: 'The world is pain . . .' and we began gravely and slowly:

The world is pain,
Its load all bearing past;
Never pine I, never thirst,
For its kingdom vain.

Rosy are her feet,
A shelter free of fear;
Death may whisper *I am near;*
He and I shall smiling meet.

Then followed song after song, song of mortals to the Immortal, of the helpless and weak to the Strong, of the weary and heavyladen to the Comforter. There were even songs voicing perplexity at the destructive fury of the Great Mother.

In fact, the worshippers of Durga or Kali never considered them in any light except as a divine mother, as omnipotent in power as she was without reserve in her love and mercy. A famous devotee of hers named Ramprasad has left a whole series of songs called after his name, which sing her praise. There is an edificatory

[1] *Giri-kumari* = Parvati.

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tale which tells of his reward. He was one day working on a partition of matting for his house, and had no assistant to hand him the ribbon of cane from the other side to fix the mat to the strips of bamboo. Suddenly, he found someone who was invisible behind the mat, pushing forward the cane from the other side. When the work was finished a little girl ran away from that side. She was Kali herself.

I shall add to this hagiographical but significant story an illustration of the spirit in which Durga-Kali was worshipped from actual life. It comes from the autobiography of a noted leader of the monotheistic Brahmo movement of the nineteenth century, Sivanath Sastri, who wholly rejected polytheism and idolatry. When he was a small boy his great-grandfather was living. He was ninety-five years old and both blind and deaf. Still the old man devoted an hour and a half every day to perform his usual rituals of a Brahmin's life. After that he used to pray personally for half an hour, bowing again and again at the feet of the family deity, Kali the Mother Goddess. In doing so the sightless man struck the floor so many times that at last a tumour was formed on his forehead. I quote from the autobiography what Sivanath wrote about the conclusion of the prayer.

> One day my mother heard him praying extempore in Bengali for my father who was working away from home: 'O merciful Mother! he is away among strangers, preserve him. He does not listen to anyone, give him virtuous inclinations.' Then he stood up and began to dance, clapping his hands. He also called for me. I was then a child and used to go about naked. My mother dragged me out of the room in which I was playing, and putting my hands into his hands asked me to dance. And we danced together forthwith. On all the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year he sang the same song. I remember only two lines of it:
>
> 'Durga, Durga, balo bhai,
> Durga bai are gati nai.' (In Bengali)
>
> 'O brethren, take the name of Durga,
> There is no refuge except in her.'

I think this disposes of all that one hears about the violent and horror-inspiring character of the worship of Kali or Durga.

As Durga, the Mother Goddess is not only the giver of prosperity, but also the dispenser of food to mankind, and in that role

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her name is Annapurna—'She who is full of food'. If she turns away her face, there will be famine and starvation. But that never happens, and cannot happen. However, she cannot endure unhappy homes, which are made so by the quarrelsome disposition of its members, especially the wife. So, another Bengali poet of the same age as Ramprasad wrote that one day she was running away from such a home and going to another household as a village woman. She came to a river bank and asked the ferry-woman to row her across. As the boat was going to the other bank of the river (it was the Hooghly River near Calcutta) the boat-woman asked her name, and she gave it in very equivocal words, so that the woman concluded that she was the wife of a Brahmin. But she saw an extraordinary thing. Her passenger was trailing her feet in the water over the gunwale. She said: 'My lady, do not do that. This river is full of crocodiles, they might drag you down.' The passenger drew in her legs and, to avoid getting wet in the water which had leaked into the boat, she placed her feet on the wooden scooper with which boatmen drain a leaking boat. At first the boatwoman had noticed that lotuses had begun to bloom suddenly in the river, and when the passenger got out she saw with greater astonishment that her wooden scooper had turned into gold. At last, realizing who her passenger was, she fell at her feet. The Great Mother smiled and said: 'Ask a boon of me. What do you want?' And the woman asked that gift which is in the Lord's Prayer: 'May my children know not the fear of starvation and always have milk and rice.'

In addition, the worship of the goddess was joyous. This joy was seen at its most exuberant in the evening of the worship, when the priest danced before the image with a five-branched candelabrum in hand. I have described this too in my autobiography. I shall only quote the opening lines of that description: 'The evening which followed had no suggestion of what we had seen in the morning, nor of what we had sung at midday. It was neither orgiastic nor devotional, but gay and heartfree, with lights blazing, a whole crowd laughing and jostling, and the wild music more self-abandoned and noisy than ever.'

The Erotic Element

The sexual obsession of the Hindus did not leave even such a cult

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free from eroticism, and this aspect must be looked straight in the face. As it happens, it is only in the cult of Durga or Kali that sexual intercourse became a part of ritual, and not merely a mythological adjunct. This element is found only in that part of the cult which is known as Tantra, and the contemporary Western interest in it is even more degraded than the recourse to Yoga.

As a subject of religious history, Tantra has to be put in its place. The first point to emphasize is that it was and is confined to a very limited number of adherents and is not general. Secondly, it is esoteric, and not like nine-tenths of Hinduism wholly open. The third and the most important thing to note is that Tantricism has three aspects, and what is being presented to the contemporary West is only one aspect, with a dubious reputation even among the Hindus.

These three aspects are the following. The first and the most widespread and openly practised Tantric devotion has nothing to do with sexual intercourse. It is a course of esoteric self-mortification and gymnastics accompanied by the worship of Kali, based on the most absurd physiological and psychological notions. These Tantric practices can be regarded as being of the same type as Yoga, with an affiliation to the cult of Durga or Kali.

The second and the third forms have sexual intercourse as part of its practice. The second is particularly cruel and cold-blooded. It was practised by the devotees of Kali known as Kapalikas, or men who worshipped with human skulls. They performed their austerities sitting on the corpse of a man whom they had sacrificed. To complete their course of devotion they raped a virgin and then sacrificed her. This form of Tantricism may have lasted till the middle of the nineteenth century. But it has disappeared wholly.

It is the third form of Tantricism which has continued and is most widespread and insidious, because it is sensual indulgence under the guise of religion. This practice is called *Vamachara*—the left-handed or perverse way—and consists in ritualistically indulging in five M's (*Pancha Makaras* in Sanskrit), namely, *madya* (alcohol), *mamsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish) and *mudra* (gestures with the hands), and *maithun* (coitus). It should be pointed out that drinking alcohol is a major sin in Hindu sacred law, and that in recent centuries orthodox Brahmins have not eaten meat or fish. That all this, and more especially coitus, could be indulged in by way of religious practice should not surprise anybody who has

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read what I have described and shall describe of the doings of the Hindus in the name of religion.

What is more relevant to the discussion of Tantra is to find out what the Hindus themselves have thought of Tantra. The Kapalikas when they existed were both hated and feared. Even in a Sanskrit play a Kapalika who wanted to sacrifice a maiden was killed by her lover, and nobody sympathized with him.[1] Bankim Chandra Chatterji, whom I have often mentioned in this book, has written a novel on this subject, and it is one of the most beautiful in the Bengali language.[2]

The Tantric practitioners of asceticism were regarded as cranks or faddists, but their sincerity was not questioned. However, for the Tantricists of the third school, i.e. the *Vamacharis*, the Hindu community had nothing but contempt and ridicule as hypocrites who wanted to satisfy their evil propensities under the pretext of religion. The Tantrics of this class have themselves shown that they are conscious of this by never acknowledging openly that they are *Vamacharis*.Those who practise the five M's secretly are spotted and pointed at with a good deal of malicious amusement. Even the modern Hindu reformer, Rammohun Roy, who drank in moderation and was a Tantric scholar, had the Tantra cast in his teeth. The orthodox pundits who attacked him said that in drinking alcohol he was only obeying the Tantric precept— '*Pitva, Pitva* . . . Drinking, and drinking, and drinking again, rolling on the ground, rising and yet drinking, a man saves himself from rebirth.'

The women who satisfied these devotees were even more perverted than the men. In fact, they were sexual maniacs. I shall relate an incident about which I was told by a friend in Calcutta in 1923. He was walking along a deserted lane late one evening in the Kalighat quarter of Calcutta. Suddenly, in the light of a street lamp, he saw through an open french window, a powerful, bearded man in red loin cloth and with a red mark on his forehead, standing before a full-limbed stark naked woman. He was so startled by this sight that he jumped backwards, and the woman sent a peal of laughter at him. As he walked forward again with a bowed head he heard more satirical, tingling laughter.

[1] *Malati-Madhava* by Bhavabhuti.
[2] *Kapala-Kundala*, published in 1867.

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What Tantric esotericism meant for the Hindus in general I shall illustrate with reference to the form of Kali known as the Chhinnamasta, i.e. 'she who is beheaded'. She is one of the ten Mahavidyas, or manifestations of Kali. The iconography shows her holding her severed head in her hand and drinking the blood which is cascading out of her neck into the mouth of the head. At the same time she is shown standing on Kama, the god of love, and Rati, his wife, who are engaged in reversed coitus under her feet. Old pictures showed even the junction of the genitalia, though the modern ones show the couple discreetly covered to the shoulders by a sheet.

As it happened, I heard a song about this manifestation of Kali in a village in Bengal in 1918. The singer was a professional, in fact a local maestro, and a Muslim at that. With staccato bowings of the violin on which he was accompanying himself he sang, 'Maddened by lust Kama and Rati are having reversed coitus' (in Bengali, *Kama Rati kamé mati, viparita karé rati*). And he even stabbed the air with his bow to demonstrate the energy of the movements of the couple. I was young then, and got rather angry. But the audience was listening spellbound.

Similarly, when I was ten or eleven years old I was told by a schoolfellow of the same age that there were pictures showing Kali sitting on Mahadeva with all her weapons and having sexual intercourse with him. Such pictures were painted in Calcutta, and I have seen them since then. But this information made no difference to my feeling for Kali. Every day before going to school I stood before the Kali temple which was near it, and with folded hands uttered my prayer. In the same way, all Hindus knew about the sexual associations of some of the Tantric religious rites, and did not think any the worse of their religion for these, any more than they thought that their society was not worth living in because there were prostitutes, adultery, or sexual crimes in it.

But the rehabilitation of Tantra for modern educated Hindus was the work of an Englishman, Sir John Woodroffe, who was a Judge of the High Court of Calcutta. From 1918 he began to expound Tantra in a series of books, some of which he wrote under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon. I myself watched his activities with interest, but I did not regard it as anything but the hobby of an eccentric. His writings had no religious significance or influence whatever. Not one Hindu capable of reading his

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books was likely to be converted to Tantric practice by them. But he appealed to them, among whom were also the barristers of Calcutta High Court, for a wholly different reason. He appealed to their nationalism. By 1918 not only Tantricism but even the highest spiritual message in Hinduism, as in the Upanishads, had ceased to be an influence in the life of modern Hindus, and so far as they did not practise religion from superstition, it was a part of their nationalism. The spectacle of an English judge of the High Court speaking for a form of Hinduism which had always been deprecated by themselves, tickled their national vanity, and they began to think much of Woodroffe and his work on Tantra. The men who would now defend Tantricism in theory would be the last men to adopt any Tantric practice, and those who would adopt it would be too well aware of their motives to speak about it.

Origin of Tantric Eroticism

There remains only one question about Tantricism. How and from where did sexual intercourse enter the cult of the Hindu Mother Goddess? The Tantric texts cannot be dated, and they are certainly all late, not composed before the eighth century at the earliest. This, however, proves nothing. Some scholars have suggested an ultimate source for Tantra in the sexual aspect of the Vedic religion. But the ancient sexuality of the Hindus had become obsolete. The new sexuality of the Krishna cult was of a quite different nature. It was honest sexual passion, not masquerading under a false name, although brought into religion. Tantric sexuality was particularly repulsive on account of its pretentiousness, cynicism, and hard-boiled licentiousness in the men and women alike. Its source has to be sought in something nearer its time of origin.

Other scholars have suggested that it came into Hinduism from Buddhistic Tantricism. The two are certainly analogous, but for that reason it is not necessary to assume that the Hindu form of Tantricism was derived from the Buddhistic. It is more likely that both were derived from the same source. There can be no doubt that Tantricism in both forms has come from the north, and from that side the only possible source for the sexual aspect of Tantricism can be Taoism.

The facts which are indisputable are these: first, Taoism is

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older than any form of Tantricism known in India; secondly, Taoism has the same kind of anatomical and physiological fantasy oriented towards erotic feeling; lastly, Taoism has a cold-blooded theory of the profit to be derived from sexual intercourse by making it a part of religious and moral life.

There is in the forefront the Taoist rigmarole about *Yin* and *Yang*. These are complementary forces which stand behind the whole cosmos, *Yin* being the female principle and *Yang* the male. Their coming together is necessary in order not only to maintain the cosmic order, but also to ensure immortality for an individual. Sexual intercourse is therefore made the central activity in the cult of Taoism, which certainly dates from the Han period (*c.* 200 B.C. to A.D. 220). But in this activity the *yang* or the male side must always cheat and gain at the expense of *yin*, the female side. Therefore the male should withhold orgasm, so as not to lose vitality, and by inducing it in the woman make her give up part of her vitality to the man. It was assumed by Taoist doctrine that a man shortened his life by being unable to control his passion and having emission in intercourse. So he was to practise such a measure of self-control as to have full pleasure from the activity without losing his strength by orgasms. Taoists laid down four principles for sexual intercourse: 1. maximum contact; 2. minimum emission; 3. frequent change of the woman; 4. intercourse with virgins.

The last principle was very logical. If the man was to gain vitality by draining it from the woman, an experienced woman was the last person to be exploited. All this theory is expressed in quite straightforward language: 'When coupling you should consider your opponent as a cheap claypot, whereas you are a precious piece. When you feel the seed is near withdraw. Sleeping with a woman is like riding a galloping horse with rotten reins, like walking on the edge of a deep precipice with swords and being frightened of falling. Spare your seed, and lengthen your life.' So a series of prescriptions are laid-down which will enable a man to have the utmost out of sexual intercourse without losing anything himself.

But if the Hindus were to take over such things from the Chinese they were not likely to do so in the Chinese spirit, for to a Hindu the idea of surrender to a woman in intercourse is the height of happiness. Moreover, the Hindu outlook on life and the Chinese

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differed fundamentally, for the Hindu sought power and the Chinese tranquillity. The same distinction was to be seen in the conception of religion, which for a Hindu was a means of attaining power. So, the incorporation of sexual intercourse in Tantricism was accomplished in a different manner and to a different end. It was to be a concerted affair between the man and the woman and the more experienced a woman was, the greater was the satisfaction and profit likely to be. With this adaptation of the aim of sexual intercourse in religion there was no obstacle to the adoption of the practice of Taoism by the Hindus. Both Tantricism and Taoism were equally cynical, but in different ways. On the Tantric side the cynicism was as much in the woman as in the man, on the Taoist side it was only in the man. After all, the Hindu was Indo-European, and he refused to make the woman merely his slave, instead of a companion.

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Chapter Three

THE CULT OF KRISHNA

AMONG the three major cults of Siva, Krishna, and the Mother Goddess, that of Krishna is the most important. It is very popular in the sense that people are attracted to it for its human quality, and in northern India certainly it has the largest number of adherents, which does not mean, of course, that those who make Krishna their personal supreme deity ever withhold their worship from the other two.

The Krishna cult is also the most joyous over the whole of India, though in Bengal the cult of the Mother Goddess Durga is not less so. It has four very happy festivals directly connected with the life and doings of Krishna, namely, the festival of his birth, and the festivals of his outing in the car (the car of Juggernaut of the West), swinging with the so-called milkmaids, and dancing with them. In addition, the most tumultuous and colourful festival of the Hindus, the Holi, which is both a festival of the spring season and a saturnalia, has become associated with Krishna.

The cult is distinguished from the two others in a number of ways. First, it cannot be traced back to the Vedic religion, i.e. to the Aryan religious heritage except indirectly. It is also unconnected with the two ways of religion known as the *Jnana Marga* (Way of Knowledge) and *Karma Marga* (Way of Works, or more correctly, of rituals), which evolved out of the Vedic religion as the standard forms of Brahmanic Hinduism.

Secondly, it is not the worship of a god of the Hindu pantheon as himself, but of his incarnation in a human form, i.e. as Krishna. He is a god because he is the human form of Vishnu, who is a Vedic god, though not a major one. But he is not an incarnation in the Hindu sense, that is, a god born into the world for a specific purpose, and therefore he is not included among the ten incarnations of Vishnu of Hindu mythology, viz. the Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-Lion, Dwarf, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Buddha, and Kalki. Krishna as an incarnation is God himself, full God and full man, thus showing a close similarity to Jesus of Christian

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theology. As such he has virtually supplanted Vishnu as an object of worship.

Thirdly, except through Vishnu, his cult is not founded on Indo-Aryan mythology, but on Indo-Aryan legends, that is to say, on the sub-historical memories of the early existence of the Aryans in India. Thus it is a wholly Indian development within the framework of the Indo-European religion.

Lastly, and this is the most important feature of the Krishna cult, it inaugurated a wholly new form of religious sentiment among the Hindus, and communicated this particular feeling to the other cults, in which it was not originally present. But the most typical and intense form of the new sentiment is to be found in the Krishna cult.

This has come to be known as *bhakti*, which signifies the self-surrender of human beings to a personal god of love, who is also to be worshipped with love and adoration. But neither *bhakti* nor the cult of Krishna founded on that sentiment has remained the same through their later evolution. Both have undergone strange and inexplicable transformations which are not paralleled even in the drastic metamorphoses in the insect world.

The feature common to all the phases is a strong emotionalism. But this, too, has changed from a concentrated and self-contained passion rather like the motive power of a ship or aeroplane driving these on a purposive course, to a maudlin exhibition of emotionalism bordering on hysteria. This last has been noticeable particularly in the cult of Krishna as practised in Bengal. There choral singing has become a form of worship, almost a ritual. Sometimes processions go out with drums and cymbals, and those who join it not only sing but dance wildly. At other times, there are sessions of singing at home, and these continue in a marathon of singing for twenty-four hours. But even after listening to the singing for half an hour men begin to cry and roll on the floor. This mode of worship has caught on in the West, but there the exhibition is not quite as exuberant as the home product.

Origin of Bhakti

The origin of this form of devotion known as *bhakti* certainly raises the most difficult question in the historical study of Hinduism, and unfortunately it has become involved in Hindu nationalism. On

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account of this theories have been put forward which cannot lay any claim to scholarship. In addition to the carelessness, amounting almost to unscrupulousness, which has been shown in considering the historical evidence, there has also been seen a total absence of psychological insight in discriminating between *bhakti* and *bhakti*, for there are surprisingly different forms of it in the Krishna cult itself.

The source of all this stumbling is the controversy about the origin of the specific kind of *bhakti* or devotion which is found in the *Gita*. This book is not only the earliest text of this kind of devotion, but also that in which a very clear-cut and coherent conception of *bhakti* is presented. In reading the *Gita* no one can form a wrong notion of what *bhakti* means in it, and the exposition is driven home in emphatic words all through the book.

Now, the *bhakti* of the *Gita* has a very close resemblance to the Christian notion of the love of God embodied in the Greek word *agape*. The similarity between many ideas of the *Gita* and the doctrines of Christianity was noticed by Warren Hastings, who set down that opinion in his introduction to the Wilkins's translation of the book. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, a German scholar, Dr. F. Lorinser, in his translation of the *Gita* into German drew attention to a number of passages in it which bore a close analogy to many passages in the New Testament, and thought that the doctrine of love in the *Gita* might have been arrived at under the influence of Christianity.[1]

Trouble started at once. The Hindus had by that time acquired the notion of historical scholarship and also nationalistic sentiment from the West, and they were not prepared to accept a Christian origin of the concept of *bhakti*, which was the most popular form of their religious sentiment. The most obvious way to reject any Christian influence on the *Gita* was to date it back to the pre-Christian era. That was done, as has been seen, without a scrap of historical evidence. Then attempts were made to push back the idea of *bhakti* to the very beginnings of Hinduism, that is, to the Vedic religion. By means of a grotesque misinterpretation of verses, 2, 4, and 5 of the 125th sukta of the tenth Mandala of the *Rig-Veda* the idea of self-surrender to a personal deity was sought

[1] *Die Bhagavad Gita übersetzt und erläutert*, by Dr F. Lorinser (Breslau, 1869). The appendix in which Lorinser showed the similarity was published in English translation in the *Indian Antiquary* (October 1873).

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to be taken to the Vedic age. Actually, in these verses the personified goddess of speech, *Vak*, only says that she will confer wealth, food and drink, and strength on those who sacrifice to her with devotion. The word *bhakti* is not used here, and the idea expressed has no resemblance whatever to the idea of self-surrender to God as presented in the *Gita*.

At the next stage the evidence for an early origin of the idea of *bhakti* has been sought in the occurrence of the word in old texts. That is to say, wherever the word *bhakti* has been found, it has been assumed that the notion behind it is that of *bhakti* of the *Gita*. The word *bhakti* does not occur in Vedic literature, but the word *bhakta* (meaning, one who has *bhakti*) occurs in the *Rig-Veda* together with the word *abhakta* (who has not *bhakti*) in verse 5 of the 127th sukta of the first Mandala. The word *bhakta* singly occurs in one of the Khila suktas. In neither of these contexts do the words mean the devotion of the *Gita*. Sayana interprets them as *sevamana* and *asevamana*, those who serve and those who do not.

Not to speak of the texts which can be presumed to have existed before the *Gita*, even those which came later and which undoubtedly preach the *bhakti* of Vaishnavism do not mean by *bhakti* what the *Gita* means. This will be demonstrated at some length in this chapter. It might be pointed out here that the mere occurrence of a word in books dating from different times does not prove that the meaning was the same in all ages. By assuming such a continuity of meaning, the notion of love in the New Testament as preached by St Paul can be taken back to Homer, for the word *agape* occurs in his writings. Even the great Attic dramatists did not use the word to mean what the Bible expressed.

In the Sanskrit language any argument about the existence of an idea based on the incidence of a word is more fallacious still, owing to the difficulty of determining the exact meaning of most words in Sanskrit, which I have already discussed.[1] Here I am illustrating the difficulty with reference to the word *bhakti* itself. As given in a good modern Sanskrit dictionary by a competent Hindu scholar, it means (1) separation, partition, division; (2) a division or part; (3) devotion, attachment, loyalty, faithfulness; (4) reverence, service, worship, homage; (5) texture; (6) decoration, ornament, embellishment; (7) an attribute; (8) being a part.

[1] See p. 216.

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Another common word in religious texts, which is also derived from the same root as *bhakti*, has a variety of meanings. It is the word *bhaga*, which combined with the suffix *van* (or *vat*), i.e. as *Bhagavan*, gives the most common name for God. Now, this word in the masculine gender (it is used also in the feminine) has at least twenty different meanings, of which the most important are the following: (1) final beatitude; (2) omnipotence; (3) morality; (4) love, affection, etc.; (5) supernatural power to become small and light; (6) name of one of the Vedic Adityas; (7) prosperity; (8) desire and also absence of desire and (9) the female organ. And just as the word *Bhagavan* is the most common name of God in religious literature and speech, the word *bhaga* and not *yoni* is the most common name for the female genital organ in the erotic texts. Therefore the word *Bhagavati*, which is the name of Durga but literally means a woman who has *bhaga*, might be very differently interpreted out of its context.[1]

Therefore the attempt to find the notion of *bhakti* as it is expounded in the *Gita* in all other contexts in which the word occurs in Sanskrit is futile, and its absurdity would have been realized if the intelligence of modern Hindus had not been paralysed by a fanatical nationalism. The exact nature of the feeling intended to be conveyed must be discovered only by taking full account not only of the immediate context but also of the character and tone of the book in question as a whole. The application of this method will lead to very startling results, as will be seen in this chapter. It will show that *bhakti* is not the same thing even in all the Vaishnava texts and that it has undergone as drastic changes as the cult of Krishna itself. In fact, the evolution of the two runs along parallel lines, but every phase in the history of the cult corresponds to every phase in the history of the sentiment. It is this history which will now be briefly summarized.

From the Epic Krishna to Krishna the God

There can be no doubt that Krishna as he is depicted in the *Mahabharata* is the earliest Krishna. In it he is an epic hero, and no god, far less God. It will perhaps be objected that the epic has

[1] In ancient India a man when he wished to show the highest respect to a lady addressed her as *Bhagavati* and not simply as *Devi* (= *Domina*). What did he mean?

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many passages which refer to Krishna as God or as an incarnation of Vishnu. But the *Mahabharata* in its present form is a compendium of mythological, legendary, and religious information of every kind, which was current when it was put in its final shape. Thus two treatises of the Krishna cult whose contents in no way agree with the epic's depiction of Krishna in its narrative parts are also incorporated in it. These are the *Gita*, which makes its teaching an episode before the beginning of a battle in total disregard of common sense; and the *Harivamsa*, an early treatise of the Vaishnava cult in which Krishna's voluptuous sports with the gopis or the so-called milkmaids are described. The epic itself does not say a word about the gopis, though it refers to Krishna's early upbringing among the cowherds. The incidental references to the godhood of Krishna in the epic have also to be regarded as interpolations in the main narrative.

If these references are not taken into account, the personality of Krishna as he is seen in the narrative portions of the *Mahabharata*, stands out clearly as a man of the heroic age. The book leaves no doubt about what he is and what he does. He is the first cousin of the Pandavas, their adviser, helper, and friend. He is also the brother-in-law, besides being a cousin, of Arjuna, the third Pandava. He acts as the charioteer of Arjuna in the battle of Kurukshetra, and saves the Pandavas from many critical situations either by his wisdom or by his cunning. The *Mahabharata* has even an abusive tirade against him from another cousin of his. Taking all these activities and traits of character into consideration, the great Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, depicted the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* as the ideal man and hero.[1]

At this point note has to be taken of a recent theory about the *Mahabharata*. Georges Dumézil, following the adumbration of the idea by the Swedish Sanskritist Stig Wikander, has demonstrated in his very important and massive work *Myth et Epopée* that the story of the Pandavas is a transposition into the epic form of the mythology of the Vedic Aryans, which presents a tripartite pantheon. This forms part of Dumézil's specific contribution to the study of the mythology and religion of all the Indo-European peoples.

[1] Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Krishna Charitra* (The Personality of Krishna), written in Bengali and published in 1892.

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But even if the mythological interpretation of the *Mahabharata* was to be admitted as valid it would make no difference to the character and spirit of the book as a compendium of the early legends of the Indo-Aryans. In its narratives and descriptions it embodies the features and atmosphere of a particular society very realistically, and this is not found in any other work in Sanskrit. For reconstructing the spirit of the first few centuries of the Aryan settlement in India the epic remains the most dependable source.

But the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* underwent a revolutionary transformation which became clearly perceptible by the beginning of the Christian era. It must have taken place a century or two earlier. Through it Krishna became the personal supreme deity of a monotheistic cult by becoming identified with Vishnu, and this Vishnu was not the Vedic Vishnu, but the Vishnu of the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, which had grown out of the Vedic religion. The Vishnu-Krishna personal god came to be generally called Vāsudeva.

This combination is so surprising that some modern scholars have put forward the idea that the Krishna of this compound personality is not the Krishna of the *Mahabharata*, but a second Krishna. This duplication is wholly gratuitous, for the references to the new Krishna do not leave any doubt that he is the Krishna of the epic. Many inscriptions not only testify to this identification, but even assign the mythological wife of Vishnu to Krishna, and the legendary wives of Krishna to Vishnu.

Obviously, the Greek Heliodorus who became a worshipper of Vāsudeva, was a convert to this new cult. But we have no testimony whatever as to the character of the devotion which this deity evoked. I have already suggested that this Vishnu-Krishna cult was probably an imitation of the monotheistic cult of Siva. Both were part of the post-Vedic movement which brought into existence what I have called the polymorphous monotheism of the Hindus.

Krishna and Bhakti in the Gita

The mists that envelop the origin and early existence of the Vishnu-Krishna cult lift all of a sudden with the appearance of one book, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and a new Krishna appears in it as

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the real, the supreme, and the only God. He also proclaims himself with an overpowering verve and resonance of tone which recalls the words in the Revelation of St John the Divine: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.' For the first time in any Hindu text the nature of *bhakti* is also fully communicated, both intellectually and emotionally. The words *bhakti* and *bhakta* are employed, but they are never explained formally. It seems to be assumed that the meanings are known to all. The manner of employing these words are similar to that with which the word *agape* and its corresponding verb are employed in the New Testament. But no doubt is left as to the nature of the devotion which is expected, and what the devotees are expected to be.

It is impossible to determine the date of the work. But the fact that it is written in good classical Sanskrit[1] and employs the two most common classic metres would justify the conclusion that it could not have been written before the second century A.D., but may have been written a century or two later. It cannot be much later, because it contains no allusion to image worship in temples which became established and widespread by the fifth century. The *Gita* refers with lofty disdain to Vedic rituals and the florid tales of those who advocate them, and with its particular conception of devotion it could not have had more respect for the temple cult.

But whenever it was written, it established itself once and for all upon its appearance. This was all the more remarkable because it rejected the Vedic ritualistic religion. In spite of that, it captured the Hindu heart. The reason was that it offered something which no previous Hindu theory or practice had done. Thus, despite its revolt against *Sruti* (revealed scriptures, i.e. the Vedas), it was raised almost to the status of *Sruti*.

The status of the *Gita* has continued through the ages among the Hindus, though the devotion which was special to it passed out of their religion after creating a successor in whom the message was transformed. In recent times the *Gita* has been put to political use. But that exploitation, too, has become obsolete.

[1] I cannot understand why the Sanskrit of the *Gita* has been called archaic by some scholars, unless it is to prove the pre-Christian date of the book. Its style and diction are as simple as that of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The style of classical Sanskrit poetry is infinitely more difficult.

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When it appeared, its teaching obviously appealed to the mind of the Hindus by the novelty of religious sentiment and experience it offered. But the book was not all new. There was a good deal in it of the traditional Hinduism of its age. Therefore, taken as a whole, it creates an impression of heterogeneity, and owing to this some scholars have supposed that it is a composite work, which certainly it is not. The impression of disunity in it is created by the fact that the old and new elements in it do not naturally cohere. It had two old elements and two new elements.

The first old element in it was its version of the *Jnana Yoga* or the discipline of knowledge, which it calls *Samkhya* without meaning the systematic philosophy which bears that name. The doctrine of this part of the *Gita* is in no way different from that of the Upanishads, with which it has many passages in common. Had this philosophical message been its only feature, it would simply have been regarded as another Upanishad. The second old element in it is Hindu self-discipline minus Hindu asceticism and self-mortification. This, the *Gita* calls *Yoga*, but this, again, is not the *Yoga* of the Yoga school of philosophy. It simply stood for that state of the mind in which a man is neither upset by sorrow nor elated by success. A man in this state is called *sthita-prajna*, i.e. a man of stabilized mentality. He is likened in a striking simile to a tortoise which withdraws its limbs into its shell. In the same way, the man of 'stabilized understanding' withdraws his senses from the objects of sense.

But the two new elements in the *Gita* were not part of the established Hindu traditions. The first of these was the doctrine of disinterested action, or *niskama karma*. According to it, a man could remain in the world and do everything which had to be done in it without any sacrifice of his religious aspirations. Indeed, no renunciation was expected from him. But the condition was that he must not expect any profit from his worldly actions and efforts. This is emphasized again and again, and a couplet which defines it has become a proverb among the Hindus. It says:

Karmaṇy evā 'dhikāras te
mā phalesu kadācana.

Thou art entitled to work,
but never to its result.
(II. 47)

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Now, such a doctrine is opposed to the natural inclinations of the human mind generally, and even more opposed to the inclinations of the Hindu mind, for a Hindu does not even worship his gods without the motive of gain. None the less, it appealed to choice spirits among the Hindus as Stoicism appealed to the Greeks and Romans. In fact, in India the attraction was greater for reflective minds. The Indian environment engendered, on the one hand, wild desires unrelated to ability and beyond all possibility of realization, and, on the other, put infinite difficulties in the way of gaining even the most reasonable objects of desire, thus creating an intolerable feeling of frustration and sorrow. This was not mere disillusionment, which cried *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*, but an open festering sore rankling day and night. The whole of Hindu philosophy was an attempt to rescue men from this mire of sorrow.[1] But the remedy it prescribed was inhuman: Be incorruptible stone or remain corruptible flesh. The *Gita* did not urge this severance of all links with the objects of the senses or with the world. Its doctrines of disinterestedness in action was easily intelligible and also emotionally satisfying. It brought into the mind peace and reconciliation with the world from a sense of having done one's duty, and it offered freedom from both sorrow and wild desires.

But the second new thing the *Gita* offered was infinitely higher, something which was not merely an armour but an adequate and positive prop of life, a great love. And the object of this love was to be a God who would never disappoint the devotee who loved him. This God was totally different from any god the Hindus had known before.

I. He was a God who was above men and not dependent on them for his functioning as the old Hindu gods were. He sought no gain from men, nor exacted any material tribute. In worshipping Him the Hindus could feel that they were not dealing with the senior partner of a business concern. The idea of contract between gods and men was wholly rejected in the new message of the *Gita*, though strangely enough it was retained in the book's exposition of orthodox doctrine.

II. This God was omnipotent, omniscient, all-pervading, and yet not an abstraction. He was personal and even more than that: he was full God as well as full man.

[1] See Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe* (1965), pp. 144 ff.

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The way of worshipping Him was also new and easy, if only men had the mental capacity and readiness. The heavy burden of performing endless rites was taken off their shoulder. He wanted only one thing—total self-surrender and love. Yet this personal God was affiliated with the most ancient and deep-seated religious sentiment of the Hindus, which was also their Indo-European heritage, namely, pantheism. Next, as man He was one of the most beloved figures of the early Hindu legends, Krishna.

But in assessing this part of the message of the *Gita* it must not be forgotten that it was neither a dogmatic nor a philosophical treatise, but a work of devotional poetry. It follows from this that the grandeur of its message cannot be felt fully unless it is read in the original, where by the combined power of its diction, sound, and rhythm, all of which transmit an intense passion, even an unbeliever is swept off his feet. I can give only a few examples which will convey nothing better than an ideological reduction of the whole message. The ring and the intensity will be lost. It should be noted that in the *Gita* Krishna speaks as God in his own person, as Allah does in the Quran or Jesus in the Bible.

I. *Declaration of the Nature of Krishna as God.*

I am the father of this world, its mother, its nurse, its grandmother.
I am the object of knowledge, the purifier, the syllable *Om*. I am *Rik*, *Sama*, *Yajus* (i.e. the three Vedas) as well. (IX. 17)
I am the goal, the supporter, the master, the witness, the abode, refuge, and friend. I am the origin, preservation, and destruction. (IX. 18)
I am the soul which abides at the heart of all things. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end. I am the letter A of the alphabet. (X. 20; X.33)
I am the foundation of the immortal and imperishable Brahman, as well as eternal righteousness and bliss. (XIV. 27)

II. *What He Demands and What He Promises*

Abandon all the ways of religion and take refuge in Me alone, and I shall emancipate thee from all evil, and be not afraid. (XVIII. 66)
Let me be all in all in thy mind, be my devotee, sacrifice to me, bow down to me, and to me alone thou shalt come. (IX. 34)
Men who have no faith in this Truth do not attain me. They will travel round the circuit of life and death. Fools despise me because they know not my status as the Lord of all beings. (IX, 3; IX. 11)

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If a man offers me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or only water with devotion, that offering of devotion I accept from him. (IX. 26)
Even if an evil-doer worships me with single-minded devotion he must be regarded as righteous in spite of all, because he has the right inclination. (IX. 30)
If those who are of base origin, such as women, Vaisyas, and Sudras, take refuge in me, even they attain the highest end. (IX. 32)
How much more would the virtuous Brahmin and the devout prince gain![1] (IX. 33)

After having proclaimed his Godhood in such words, Krishna revealed himself to Arjuna as the whole universe, and Arjuna uttered his famous hymn to Krishna as the embodiment of all phenomena. Krishna then declared that this vision could not be seen by the study of the Vedas, nor by charities, nor by performing rites, nor by severe self-mortification. This form of Krishna as the universal, infinite, and primal God was shown to Arjuna as an act of grace.

At the same time this God is also a God of righteousness, of wrath, and of retribution. Thus one finds in the *Gita* the assurance which has sustained the Hindus in all their secular tribulations:

Whenever there is any decline of righteousness
and an upsurge of unrighteousness,
then do I create myself
to destroy the unrighteous
and to save the righteous,
and thus re-establish righteousness
from age to age.
(IV. 7–8)

It has to be pointed out that this is not the orthodox Hindu doctrine of the incarnations of Vishnu. Those incarnations were meant to be special acts of intervention of the god to save the Aryan order from specific crises. And the last incarnation, Kalki, traditionally still to come, is to destroy all the unclean foreigners who have oppressed the Hindus. The incarnations which Krishna promises will come in order to save mankind from unrighteousness. Such a voice was never before heard in Hinduism, and was

[1] In its social doctrine, the *Gita* was not egalitarian, but staunchly attached to the caste system, and to it only the Brahmin and the Kshatriya were noble by birth.

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not heard again after the *Gita*. But it was heard, as related in Acts of the Apostles, at Athens, where the Parthenon gleamed above the speaker: 'He hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world by righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.'

The question where the two new elements of the *Gita* came from has now to be considered. One thing is certain, neither existed in Hinduism before the book was written. It can be set down briefly that the doctrine of disinterestedness in action came from Stoicism, and the God of the *Gita* from Christianity. It is equally certain that both the notions were present in the Graeco-Roman world in a fully elaborated form when the *Gita* was written. These facts are so decisive that an attempt has been made to evade them by postulating that the God of the *Gita*, or at all events a prototype, existed in a popular form of Hinduism whose existence is not recorded in the old and orthodox texts. This is quite characteristic of those who deal with Indian history or Hinduism. Whenever they cannot find any evidence for anything in which they believe *a priori*, they assert that the evidence has disappeared. To deny that which exists, and to explain with prolixity what does not, has become such an integral feature of the methodology of those who deal with India and Hinduism that its queerness is not even noticed.

I shall dispose of the question of the derivation of disinterestedness in action briefly. No such thing existed before and even though preached by the *Gita* it has not taken root.[1] On the other hand, it may be assumed that the Hindus had some information about Greek philosophy. Even in the Greek translations which Asoka provided for his inscriptions familiarity with Greek philosophical vocabulary is seen.

But the question of the derivation of the God of the *Gita* from Christianity has to be taken up at greater length. The view was first put forward in a scholarly form by the great German Sanskritist, Albrecht Weber, and Lorinser was one of his students. Two lines of argument were at once advanced against the theory. First, it was pointed out that the parallel passages were analogous rather than exact reproductions, and, secondly, that the *Gita* does

[1] In Delhi I had a small roof-garden. Watching the amount of trouble I took to keep it up, all my neighbours assumed that I was a nurseryman.

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not contain the Christian *kerygma*, or the developed theology. Anything more naïve can hardly be imagined. If the book contained the Christian doctrine verbatim then the Hindus would have been Christian themselves. Secondly, there was no reason for the *Gita* to be a translation of the New Testament.

The question of derivation should be decided, not by comparing the so-called parallel passages, but by the general cast of the feelings and thoughts. I would call that taking note of the typology of thought and feeling. No one reading the *Gita* without preconception can help feeling that its teaching has a remarkable similarity to that of the New Testament, so far as its notion of God and idea of devotion to him are concerned. In cultural history independent creation of ideas which closely tally with each other is very rare.

A parallel instance of derivation can be given from the cultural evolution of India in the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that the monotheistic movement in Hinduism of the late nineteenth century known as the Brahmo movement was inspired by Christianity. But the formal dogmas of this monotheism were all referred back to the Upanishads. And the Brahmos themselves were very unwilling to acknowledge their debt to Christianity. Sikhism, too, had behind it the monotheism of Islam. But Guru Nanak cited the Upanishads in his credo.

The only question which has to be considered is whether the Hindus could have any knowledge of Christianity in the age of the *Gita*. Weber assumed that there might have been Christian colonies on the borders of India to the north-west. There is no evidence for it, but it is not inherently improbable. Apart from that, there is the legend of St Thomas in India. He is supposed to have preached Christianity in south India. But knowledge of Christianity could have existed in India just as some knowledge of Hindu philosophy was present in the Graeco-Roman world.

I would, however, lay particular emphasis on the fact that neither the concept of a God of love nor the kind of devotion for him which is found in the *Gita* took root in India. Both were so exotic that they were transformed into wholly new things. The God of the book became Krishna of the Vaishnavism of later texts. The love which he demanded in the *Gita* also became a different kind of love. This transformation will now be described.

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Krishna and the Gopis

The cult of Krishna which is now current among the Hindus and the devotion or *bhakti* on which it takes its stand, are not founded on the *Gita*. Certainly, the book has a firm place in Hindu religious life, but that only makes it like the fossil ammonite which is the symbol of Vishnu in every Hindu household. The living Vaishnavism originated with three texts: the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Harivamsa*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*. Of these, the last is the most authoritative. Doctrinally, it remains the basic book of the Krishna cult.

In the current Krishna cult the gopis or womenfolk of the cowherd clan of Vraja, where according to legend Krishna was brought up as a child, are always associated with him. They are not mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. They make their appearance in the Krishna cult for the first time in these three texts. They not only appear but are also shown engaged in singing and dancing with Krishna, and also having amorous sports collectively. The degree of familiarity varies in the three texts. In one it is not much closer than what is usually seen when young men and women amuse themselves together. Even such association is frowned upon by their elders as immodest. In another text there is a strong display of amorousness, with embracing and kissing. The degree of voluptuousness displayed also varies. But in the *Bhagavata Purana*, the basic text of Vaishnava doctrines and especially of the new Vaishnava *bhakti*, both nudity and sexual intercourse are described. No vagueness is left on this point.

The dates of these books cannot be determined. But they cannot be earlier than the eighth century, for Krishna's sports with the gopis are not mentioned in the works of classical Sanskrit literature considered in the historical part of this book. At first sight, these stories seem to have originated as secular pastoral poetry from the legend of the early life of Krishna among the cowherds. But no such work has been found. The *Vishnu Purana* and the *Harivamsa* are the only early works extant which describe Krishna's amorous adventures. Both the books belong to the class of Puranas, and it is not unusual for them to tell the stories of the gods in more or less human terms. Even those books which are regarded as religious texts at times contain passages which read like secular poetry, and describe love between men and women.

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In any case, in respect of Krishna and the gopis, it was the *Bhagavata Purana* which definitely established the norm.

This book contains a good deal of dogmatic and doctrinal exposition in the philosophical style. As has been just said, doctrinally it is regarded as the most authoritative text of Vaishnavism. Anything can be made out from these expositions by a person with a metaphysical turn of mind, or nothing at all. The doctrines are obscure, and the exposition verbose. This style is normal in what might be called Hindu patristic literature.

What is neither obscure nor esoteric in the *Bhagavata Purana* is the illicit character of the relations of the gopis with Krishna as well as its erotic tone. Adultery is both the doctrinal and the practical expression of the cult of *bhakti* in this book, and adultery itself is committed collectively and promiscuously. The whole concept of religious devotion in it is based on adultery, which is given a spiritual value. The doctrinal position is that a person who loves Krishna as God must be ready to sacrifice for that love what the world regards as virtue. To give a stronger colour to this doctrine, it is represented that the sacrifice of virtue must be of the kind which is seen when a woman becomes unfaithful to her husband for the sake of a lover. But an extraordinarily subtle point, intelligible only to a Vaishnava of the Bhagavata school, is made in regard to the quality of the love which the woman must feel for her lover, Krishna. Even though they are being unfaithful to their husbands for his sake, they must not think of him as their paramour *(jāra)*, but as husband *(pati)*, because a woman's purest love is for her husband. Thus, according to the dogmatists, there is no conceptual adultery in the practical adultery.

This doctrine is driven home in parables in the manner of the New Testament. Some Brahmin women come to Krishna and offer themselves to him. But in order to put their devotion to test he upbraids them severely for their unchaste inclinations. Ashamed of themselves, they go back, and thus reveal the shallowness of their *bhakti* and lose their chance of being one with Krishna. On the contrary, some cowherd women, i.e. the gopis, also come. They are also tested in the same manner. But they refuse to be dissuaded from adultery, and are rewarded for their staunchness. Krishna accepts their love and has sexual intercourse with them, accompanied with scratching, biting, etc. These are particularized in the *Bhagavata*.

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Modern Hindu commentators dwell on the sublimity and purity of the conception, and pour scorn on those who see only adulterous sexual gratification in these proceedings. They all say that these accounts must be taken allegorically. But nobody explains why such allegories should have been necessary to persuade the Hindus to have *bhakti* for Krishna, and why again, if such allurements were necessary, the *Gita* did not offer them. Even the exponents of *bhakti* of the Bhagavata school admit that the form in which it is presented in that book is the highest.

Yet the new elements which are introduced into the idea of *bhakti* can be accounted for. These elements are the following: first, love for Krishna as God must correspond to sexual love between men and women; secondly, it must be adulterous sexual love; finally, this love must be simple physical satisfaction, accompanied only by that much and that kind of emotion which is always felt when the intercourse is brought about by passion, i.e. when it is not that which is offered by a prostitute.

All three elements are intelligible in terms of life led by the Hindus in India and the psychological compulsions created by that life. First, the notion of love among them was very concrete: it was either love for a woman, wife or not, for the child, and for the mother. They could not conceive of any love which was impersonal and disembodied. Therefore as soon as they acquired the notion that a god could be loved, which was totally absent in their religion before, they began to love the supreme goddess as mother, and Krishna both as a lover and as a child, in the latter form as *Bala Gopala*. Of these two kinds of love, the sexual was bound to be the stronger, and therefore it was made the more common form. Thus in later Vaishnavism love for Krishna as God was transposed from the key of *agape* in which it was given in the *Gita*, to the key of *eros* in obedience to the law of cultural interaction that all influences received from outside are recast in the national mould.

From this to the preference for adulterous love was a short step. If the intensity of *bhakti* was to be equated with the intensity of the sexual passion, both were likely to be enfeebled by confining the latter passion to its humdrum expression in wedlock. This is universally true, in so far as sexual satisfaction is the primary object in the man-woman relationship.

Early marriage, arranged marriage, polygamy, and perpetual

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widowhood generated an intense yearning for sexual satisfaction outside wedlock among Hindu women. Of this, there is overwhelming proof in Sanskrit literature, in literature in the modern Indian languages, and also in practice so far as it can be observed. The position was something like what was seen in France when arranged marriages were the rule in that country, and when every married woman actually had or was supposed to have an *amant*. Hindu poets, of course, made the most of it, and I translate a lyric by a witty Bengali poet of the eighteenth century, who makes a woman vehemently reproach Brahma the Creator for a sad failure in creation. She says:

> O cruel Creator, how can I admit thy skill,
> when thou hast failed to meet the wishes and hopes
> of a woman who does not regard the world?
> Thou couldst give two of each,—legs, eyes, and ears,—
> and yet could'st not give two wings to fly.
> Didst thou trick me because I have tested
> the strength of every variety of man in all the fourteen worlds?
> How shall I endure all this sorrow, but how can I blame others,
> when even Thou with thy four faces and regal attributes
> hast miserably failed me?

Of course, this was hyperbolic, but all notes, however high, must have a tonic as the starting point.

Lastly, the whole satisfaction in the sexual relationship is sought in the physical act, however casual. Any occasion, any man, is good enough. Even in the married state, love between husband and wife in Hindu society meant nothing more than pleasure in the sexual act, so far as it was an intimate passion, and not the more social affection.

This reduction of love to its most concrete realization stemmed from the suffering inflicted by the conditions of living in India, especially the climatic. There was only one escape from it, and that was through the swoons induced by sexual intercourse. As I have put it in an earlier book:

> There is a passage in Plato, in which he gives an example of release from the sexual desire, that tyrant which is homicidal and suicidal at the same time. Cephalus is reported to have asked Sophocles in old age whether he still sought the pleasure of intercourse and was capable of it. Hush, replied the poet, my greatest

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joy is to have escaped from that fierce and savage master. No Hindu would have called that joy. In his revulsion from sexual enjoyment he was capable of some very tortured psychological and physiological acrobatics, but to have complete freedom was the last thing he cared for, because to give up lust was for him to turn his back on life itself.[1]

So, the supreme happiness was to continue the forgetfulness from sexual intercourse indefinitely, and if that could not be done practically the oblivion had to be sought in its vicarious creation in literature and religion. This terrible compulsion was bound to transform *bhakti* into sexual enjoyment. The *Bhagavata* only initiated the movement, which was completed in later works. *Bhakti* pursued its Hinduized course.

Krishna and Bhakti in Brahmavaivarta Purana

It is in this Purana that the Krishna cult reached the form in which it is seen today. That is to say, he is seen in it for the first time with Radha, and she as an equal object of worship with him. Krishna's love affairs are no longer with a nameless bevy of gopis. Radha is named in this Purana as the supreme mistress. In it, however, she is his wedded wife. The others remain certainly, but only as mistresses. They are legion.

Radha is wholly unknown in previous literature, and how and why she comes into the Krishna legend cannot be explained. However, after entering it she remains. For many Vaishnavas she is even more important than Krishna, for she represents the worshipper.

Since the date of this Purana is unknown the time at which the Krishna cult received this addition cannot be determined. Two inscriptions of the tenth century refer to her. This would make her cult as old, and there is no inherent improbability that the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* existed in some form in that century. I have found a reference to Radha in the well-known collection of poems in Prakrit which is called *Gatha Saptasati*, in the 89th poem of the first hundred *(sataka)*. This is surprising, for this anthology is generally dated some centuries earlier than the time of the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*. However, there is no reason to accept all the poems in this collection as equally early.

[1] *The Continent of Circe*, p. 203.

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There is no doubt that the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* brought about a revolution in the cult of Krishna, and made it substantially different from what it was even in the *Bhagavata Purana*. It not only continued the erotic trend in the cult which had begun with the *Vishnu Purana* and *Harivamsa* and risen to a *forte* in the *Bhagavata* but also made it *fortissimo*. This heightened eroticism was to remain a permanent feature of the cult of Krishna.

Yet the irreconcilable dichotomy between *bhakti* and eroticism is not resolved in this Purana, strong as the latter element is in it. Its doctrinal stand is unexceptionable. Not only is the illicit and adulterous element in the love of Krishna for the gopis in the previous texts removed by making Radha his wife, the relationship is also defined metaphysically. There are some inconsistencies in the statements, but the main position is clearly set down in more than one place. This exposition is put in the mouth of Krishna in speeches to Radha. The following is the translation of one of them in the Chapter 15 of the *Krishna Janma Khanda*, or the fourth part of the book:

> Wherever you are (says Krishna) there also am I, and verily there is no difference. As whiteness is in milk, power to burn in fire, scent in earth, so am I invariably in you. Just as the potter cannot make pots without clay, goldsmiths cannot make ear ornaments without gold, in the same way I cannot create without you. You are the basis of creation by me. I am the imperishable seed . . . I am simple 'Krishna' when without you, but 'Sri (prosperous)—Krishna' with you. You are 'Sri' (prosperity), you are possession, you are like a vessel, and the embodiment of all the power belonging to others and to me. O Radha, you are the woman, I am the man, not even the Vedas can deny that. O imperishable! you are the embodiment of all, I am the same. When I am energy, you are then the embodiment of energy. Since I am not corporeal, you too are incorporeal. O Beauty! when I become the seed of everything through yoga, you become the embodiment of power and assume the form of all women!

This definition of the mutual relations of Krishna and Radha is accompanied in the book by many descriptions of the practical activities of the incorporeal couple. I cannot quote all of them, and so restrict myself to a single description out of many of their coitus, which is to be found in the same chapter from which the definition has been quoted. These narratives and descriptions are

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put in the mouth of Narayana or Vishnu himself who is explaining the greatness of Krishna to Narada.

> Narayana *uvacha* (Thus spake Narayana):
> Krishna pulled her (Radha) with both of his arms to his breast and stripped her of her clothes. Then he kissed her in four different ways. In the combat of coitus the bells in Radha's girdle were torn off, the colour on her lips was wiped off by the kisses, the leaves drawn with sandal paste on her breasts were rubbed off, her hair came loose, and the vermilion marks on her forehead disappeared.
>
> Then Radha mounted Krishna and had reversed coitus. The red lac on her feet was rubbed off, she had goose-flesh on her body, and in her swoon could not perceive whether it was night or day. Afterwards, Krishna had coitus with her in eight positions, and tore her body to shreds by biting and scratching. The bells in Radha's girdle and her anklets made sweet sounds, and unable to bear any more Radha ceased from the combat of coitus.

Krishna now felt that in his preoccupation with Radha he was doing injustice to the other gopis, who were equally devoted to him, and so he went out to satisfy them in the park. There were, however, 900,000 of them, and in order to satisfy them Krishna became 900,000 different men. These exact figures are given in the text, and it adds that the park resounded with the coitus of 1,800,000 persons. Then it proceeds to describe the collective sexual orgy.

> Narayana *uvacha* (Thus spake Narayana):
> Then the supreme Guru of all the Yogis assumed many forms and had intercourse with them in such a manner as would satisfy them. O Narada! from all this coitus arose the charming sound of bells, bangles, and anklets of the women. All of them swooned from pleasure . . . Recovering consciousness Krishna began to bite and scratch them, and they him. Krishna scratched their breasts with his nails, and made marks on their firm buttocks. They were beautiful in their nakedness.

Then Narayana explained to Narada that out of the sixteen modes of coitus prescribed by those who were learned in sexual matters, Krishna executed twelve and besides performed all that was laid down to be done at the beginning of coitus, during it, and after its end. Indeed, Narayana said, Krishna did more.

The most remarkable feature of the book is not that these descriptions are found in it, but that these are accompanied by the

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denunciation of licentiousness in women in ferocious language, some of which is extremely coarse, e.g. the description of the vulva of a woman as a cesspool and the statement that at the mere sight of a handsome young man their organ becomes moist *(yoni klidyati)*.

Finally, the book closes with the following statement about the profit to be gained from listening to it:

> Whoever *with due control over his passions* and after having avowed the purpose of performing a rite on an auspicious occasion, listens to the fourth part of this Purana from beginning to end is undoubtedly released from the sins committed by him either in childhood, or while attaining the age of puberty, youth, and old age in tens of millions of births. [Italics mine.]

The new dimension given to *bhakti* by the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* was continued by others. But one basic departure from its version was made by them. They completely ignored the status of wife given to Radha by this *Purana* and made her, not only his mistress as the wife of another man, but also his maternal aunt *(Māmi)* as the wife of his foster-mother's brother. Thus there was not only a reversion to the pattern of *bhakti* as adulterous love established by the *Bhagavata Purana*, but also its intensification as incestuous love. The men who followed the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* as continuators of the erotic tradition were poets of considerable merit. They had more psychological insight than the author of that book.

The most famous of them was Jayadeva, who flourished in the twelfth century and is supposed to have been a poet at the court of Vallalasena, the last great Hindu king of Bengal before the Muslim conquest. His version of *bhakti* has now to be considered.

Bhakti in Jayadeva

The *Gita-Govinda* (Songs of Govinda or Krishna) has been accepted since it was composed in the twelfth century as one of the greatest texts of *bhakti* in the Vaishnava cult. Its influence has been immense all over India. Its episodes have been given graphic expression in painting, and the whole poem has been sung, because in form it is a song-cycle like Schubert's *Schöne Müllerin* or *Winterreise*, with precise directions about the melody and time for every aria. At the same time it is lyric poetry of consummate artistry, and so far

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as erotic feeling is legitimate in literature it expresses the feeling at its most burning.

Jayadeva himself placed it in the hands of wise and learned men with a modest confidence, and wrote that these men who might have derived pleasure from the book would correct its faults, though he had put in it all that was virtuosity in music, meditation in the Vaishnava faith, analysis in the consideration of erotic feeling, and artistry in poetry.

No fault whatever was found in it, and its high status was admitted from the very beginning. A well-known work of hagiography by Chandradatta (probably written in the sixteenth century) contains an account of Jayadeva's life in three chapters and relates a curious story about the test to which the *Gita-Govinda* was put. It says that the king who was his patron became jealous when he heard the poem, and composed another *Gita-Govinda* himself. He ordered that only his poem was to be sung and no other, and threatened severe punishment for those who disobeyed. So Jayadeva's work was neglected. But one day, going to the temple of Jagannath, the king found the poet himself singing it. In great wrath he asked whether he was not aware of his order.

The frightened Jayadeva replied that he certainly knew it, but he was singing his own poem because the Lord preferred it. In order to convince the king of this he suggested the test that both the books might be placed before the image of the god and he asked to indicate by a sign which he liked the better. The king agreed, and taking both the books placed them before the image, saying that the work which was preferred should be placed on top of the other. Then he went out with all the others, and closed the door of the sanctum himself. After a little while he re-opened the door and everybody saw that Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda* had been placed on top of the king's. In great mortification the king gave up eating and drinking, but Krishna appeared to him in a dream, comforted him, and reconciled him to Jayadeva.

The poem is not long, and as printed in large type it occupies without the commentaries 42 demy-octavo pages. It does not relate the whole story of Radha's relations with Krishna, but only a few incidents occupying one day, thus observing all the unities of time and place. It opens with a scene in which on a cloudy day Radha is seen wandering in sorrow at her separation from Krishna, and closes with a full description of her reunion with

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him. As it is not possible to include here all that happens on that single day, I shall translate only the opening lament and the description of the last scene. I shall add to the translations the annotations provided by the commentators to only one stanza to show what they made of the poem.

The aria is in the second cycle, and is to be sung in the Gurjari melody. In it, unable to endure her distress any more, Radha asks her friend: 'O *Sakhi*, make Krishna have coitus with me, for I am inflamed with the desire for it', and then she recites in six strophes her anticipation of what will happen to her on the one hand and to Krishna on the other, when he arrives:

I. I shall feel bashful meeting him after such a long time:
but he will make me willing by saying a hundred pretty things.
I shall smile sweetly and speak gently:
and he will loosen the silk sari on my mons veneris. (Refrain)

II. I shall be laid on a bed of leaves:
and he will lie for a long time on my breast.
I shall embrace him hard and kiss him:
he will embrace me equally hard and kiss my lower lip. (Refrain)

III. I shall close my eyes in langour:
His cheeks will become beautiful with lines of pleasure.
My body will become wet with the sweat of exertions:
He will become tremulous with the excitement of supreme lust.
(Refrain)

IV. I shall coo with the notes of the cuckoo:
He will surpass the directions given in the erotic books.
Flowers in my hair will fall, and my chignon will come loose:
He will mark my heavy and full breasts with his nails. (Refrain)

V. The bejewelled anklets on my feet will tinkle:
He will complete the demonstration of coitus.
My girdle will jingle and become torn:
He will pull me by the hair and give me kisses. (Refrain)

VI. I shall become languid from pleasure at the moment of orgasm:
He will half close his eyes which are like lotuses.
My creeper-like body will sink, unable to endure any longer:
and Krishna will be delighted by the satisfaction of his passion.
(Refrain: *O Sakhi*, etc.)

One should have thought that the poet was frank enough. But the commentators did not think so. They elaborated every statement circumstantially, explaining what was done and according to which direction of the *Kamasutra*, and they quoted the relevant

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aphorisms. I have consulted five commentaries, all old, viz. *Rasikapriya* by King Kumbha, *Rasamanjari* by Samkara Misra, *Sanjivani* by Vanamalibhatta, *Padadyotika* by Narayana Pandita, and *Jayanti* by Krishna. I shall cite what they have to say about the fifth strophe translated above.[1]

They identify the postures of coitus, as well as the movements, by the limbs involved and the sounds described. It should be explained that the *Kamasutra* not only prescribes postures *(samvesana* or *bandha* in Sanskrit) but also the movements for friction *(upasripta* in Sanskrit). Thus, with the indications given by Jayadeva, the commentators say that three separate acts of coitus are described in the fifth strophe, the first and the third by Radha in man's posture, and the middle one by Krishna in the normal man's position.

They further say that the ornaments and their sounds indicate particular movements. Thus the tinkling of the anklets on Radha's feet means she was executing the movement known as *bhramaraka* (*Kamasutra*, Bk. 2, ch. 8), in which the woman sits erect on the man with her knees flexed and rotates her hips like a potter's wheel, but only in a semicircle. That would make the anklets rotate in the same manner and the small bells on them tinkle. Then Krishna goes on top, because this particular movement was very tiring and Radha had to rest. The commentator puts that in the mouth of Radha as an explanation: 'Finding me tired by the *bhramaraka* [posture], Krishna himself would continue the coitus *(bhramaraka-bandhena śrāṃtām viditvā svayam api mām ramayishyati).*' Then Radha resumes her position on Krishna and the sounds made by her girdle with its little bells and the additional fact that its string is broken indicate, three commentators say, that she is executing the movement known in the *Kamasutra* as *prenkholita*, in which the woman waves her hips forwards and backwards and from side to side.

To conclude the description of Jayadeva's *bhakti* I shall only translate the essential verses of Radha's reunion with Krishna from the twelfth cycle:

At last Krishna comes, and they quarrel a little. But she is reconciled and, in order to punish him, she defiantly begins her coitus in the posture of a man. The poet writes:

[1] For these see *Gita-Govinda*, edited by M. R. Telang (1899); and the same work edited by A. Sharma, K. Deshpande, and Sundara Sharma (1969).

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Even though tightly clasped by her arms, pressed by her heavy breasts, scratched by her nails, bitten in the lower lip by her teeth, pounded by her buttocks, pulled by the hair, and intoxicated by the honey of her lips, the Beloved felt only a partial satisfaction—O how crooked is the way of desire!

She had impetuously mounted above, resolved to win a victory over her beloved with confidence in her dexterity in the combat of coitus: but how long can man's airs be assumed successfully by a woman? The region of her mons veneris became numb, her arms and her thighs slackened, her breast throbbed, and her eyes closed.

The episode ends with Radha imploring her beloved to restore her clothes and adornments, and Krishna contemplating her body with ecstasy. Jayadeva concludes: 'May Krishna, with his eyes fixed on the breasts of Radha, purify us!'

I have already explained why in writing this book I had decided not to fight shy of plain speaking. I quote all these elaborate explanations of Jayadeva because of the stand taken up by modern Hindus. They fanatically maintain that these descriptions only illustrate in allegories man's union with God. I quote two such opinions. The author of the most exhaustive work on Hindu philosophy, the late Professor Surendra Nath Das-Gupta, C.I.E., M.A., Ph.D. (Cal. and Cantab.), D.Litt. (Rome), Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom (so he is designated on the title-page of the book), writes on p. 389 of the fourth volume of his *History of Hindu Philosophy*: 'Most of these were mystic songs of love for Krishna in erotic phraseology.'

The second explanation is from a former high official of the Government of India, S. P. A. Ayyar, M.A. (Oxon.), I.C.S., Barrister-at-law, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom (so he also is designated on the title-page of the book from which I am quoting). He actually takes the offensive in the preface to his book *Sri Krishna: The Darling of Humanity* (1952) and declares:

There is nothing wrong in this conception of Krishna as the Husband of all Women, any more than in the conception of God as the Father of all Men. It means only Marriage with Krishna like the Marriage with Christ.

In support of this argument he quotes from the very strophes I have quoted but in a translation by Sir Edwin Arnold so unrecognizably bowdlerized that it raises doubts about the intellectual

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honesty of Edwin Arnold himself. Then S. P. A. Ayyar quotes St Teresa's declaration of her devotion to Christ, to parallel Radha's to Krishna.

Not all modern exponents of the Krishna cult exhibit such blatant failure of intelligence or alternatively such repulsive hypocrisy. But all of them are infected with an unctuous furtiveness in dealing with the quite open, unabashed, and even defiant eroticism of the cult. They never squarely face the psychological situation presented, which, as has been explained, is easy to see and to account for.

Fortunately, the cult can dispense with these feeble antics of modern Hindus, and the great authorities on the 'philosophy' or 'theology' of Vaishnavism are honourably free from such sophistries. For instance, the six philosophical exponents of Vaishnavism of the sixteenth century—the so-called Goswamis of Brindaban—are quite straightforward about the matter. One of them, Rupa Goswami, so far from trying to represent the eroticism as the symbolic expression of a mystic union of man with God, actually assimilates the sexual intercourse between Radha and Krishna to the absurd systematization of the sexual relationship as found in Sanskrit poetics. His gloss on the coitus between Radha and Krishna as described by Jayadeva in the aria quoted above is most revealing.

He says that the exhaustion of Radha after her strenuous coitus with Krishna in the reversed posture is one of the divergent or transient motifs of the *madhura* (literally 'sweet', but really signifying 'erotic') aspect of Vaishnava *bhakti*. This interpretation is to be found in his famous treatise *Ujjala-Nilamani* (ch. 13, v. 18), and in it he says that Jayadeva's verse embodies only that state of Vaishnava *bhakti* which is seen in the temporary exhaustion *(glani)* produced by violent coitus: i.e. it is an accidental flat in a bright melody in C major.

None of the Vaishnava 'theologians' considered the kind of *bhakti* as manifested through sexual intercourse accompanied by kissing, biting, scratching, squeezing of the breasts, waving of the hips, and orgasm as any kind of lust *(kāma)*. They took the view presented by the *Bhagavata Purana*, and developed it further. They held no truck with symbolism.

Their interpretation is found in its most characteristic form in the famous hagiographical work on the life of Chaitanya written

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by Krishnadas Kaviraj, a disciple of the Vaishnava philosophers of Brindaban, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. He says that lust *(kāma)* differs from love *(prema)* as iron differs from gold. 'Lust' is satisfaction for self, whereas 'love' is nothing but satisfaction of Krishna, or in other words, lust is self-indulgence and love is the pleasure of Krishna.

Next to that, self-indulgence *(atma-sukha)* consists in paying regard to social conventions, to the way prescribed by the Vedas, to activities concerned with the body, to the promptings of shame, to the laws of restraint, to bodily pleasure, to the unrelaxed grip of the Aryan path, to the opinion of one's relatives, and to their denunciation and persecution. On the other hand, those who disregard all these and dedicate themselves to Krishna for the sake of giving pleasure to him alone, only surrender to 'love' *(prema)*.

It is this, Kaviraja declares, which is to be regarded as 'firm love' for Krishna. This love is like a laundered piece of cloth on which there is no stain. There is thus a great difference between 'lust' and 'love'—lust is darkness and love is the shining sun. There is not a trace of lust in the love of the gopis for Krishna, all that they do is for the sake of giving pleasure to Krishna.[1]

This is indeed a revolutionary doctrine of surrender to the sexual impulse in the name of religion. The only thing which it does not explain is why Krishna as God should always exact sexual intercourse as the supreme act of surrender to him and also why he would, for preference, play a passive part in the sexual intercourse. But that is Vaishavism in its latest phase. This is the strange climax to the *bhakti* or *agape* of the *Gita*, which was derived from Christianity. The dying Julian had to admit defeat at the hands of Christ, but the Hindu could say: 'Thou hast *not* won, O Galilean!'

Chaitanya and his Vaishnavism

Chaitanya is certainly the most striking figure in the whole history of Vaishnavism, and the way of devotion he preached one of the most astonishing and bizarre phenomena in the history of religion. The historical evidence on his life and activities is very complete and reliable, in spite of the presence in it of many hagiographical stories of miracles. Out of this evidence Chaitanya emerges as a

[1] (*Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Adilila, ch. 4, vv. 164–72.)

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figure of history and not of legend as many of the prophets and preachers of Hinduism even of recent times have become. As presented in the two biographies written within fifty years of his death, he appears to have been a character of demoniac passion and Dionysiac frenzy, given to extravagant emotional fits from an early age. He was also a man of impressive appearance, tall and fair, as well as very handsome. The date of his birth is given as 1407 of the Saka era (A.D. 1485) and that of his death as 1455 Saka (A.D. 1533). The forty-eight years of his life are also precisely accounted for. For the first twenty-four years he lived in the world and was married. Even then he was very religious and was often engaged in devotional singing and dancing. At twenty-four he left the world and after that lived the life of a Hindu holy man, mostly at Puri on the Bay of Bengal, the seat of the famous Jagannath (anglicized as Juggernaut). During this period he also travelled for six years, going to south India as well as to upper India as far as Brindaban. He died at Puri.

His physical presence, personality, and behaviour were the real force behind the new form of Vaishnavism he preached. These impressed people so much that they joined his movement in crowds, and increased its momentum by the sheer weight of numbers. He was looked upon as an incarnation of God, and miraculous tales gathered around his life. Three of these might be reproduced here.

He was said to have been born after not less than thirteen months of pregnancy of his mother, and soon the symbols of Vishnu were seen on his feet and hands. He was also born with philosophical knowledge. One day, when he was a toddler, his mother gave him some parched rice and sweets to eat, and went to the kitchen to finish her cooking. When she came to look after him again she found him eating the soil from the mud floor instead of the rice and the sweets. When she scolded him for this he cried and complained of unfair treatment. He said that the rice and sweets were only products of the earth, and so, instead of eating earth at one remove, he was doing that directly. Astonished, his mother cried out: 'Who has taught thee *Jnana Yoga* at this age?' This remark showed what *Jnana Yoga* (the Hindu Way of Knowledge) appeared to be in popular imagination.

With his devotional singing and dancing he tamed and converted wild beasts, even surpassing Orpheus. When going to

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Brindaban from Puri he took a short cut through the forests of Orissa instead of going by the well-known roads. Even now this region is infested with wild elephants and tigers. But these and other wild animals always made way for Chaitanya. One day in his absent-mindedness he trod on a tiger which was lying in his path. His companion was terrified. But Chaitanya only asked the tiger to chant the name of Krishna, and the beast stood up on its hind legs and began to sing about Krishna. Shortly afterwards, deer were so charmed by his singing that some does joined and marched with him reciting the name of Krishna. Some tigers also came up, and overwhelmed by the message of love began not only to sing with the does, but also to embrace and kiss them, and the does too returned the caresses.

In later tradition the memory of the true personality of Chaitanya became dim, and he was represented as a very gentle character, who was always preaching love and was also ready to turn the other cheek. But near contemporary biographers show him as a very aggressive man, always ready to go over to the offensive against those who thwarted him. He defied not only the Brahmin pundits who opposed and vilified him, but even the Muslim Qadi who at the instigation of the Brahmins forbade the processions. Chaitanya threatened to kill the judge, and with his followers attacked his house, upon which the Qadi admitted the truth of the new message.

Such a revolutionary character was bound to dominate the populace, and Chaitanya put an irresistible power behind his movement by the sheer abnormality of his goings on. The Brahmins said that his extravagant singing and dancing bouts were due to drunkenness. But besides the impression created by his personality, the religious situation in Bengal in the late fifteenth century also helped his movement.

Chaitanya's movement was one expression of a revival of the Vaishnava cult during the fifteenth century all over northern India. The cult had not only continued to exist after the Muslim conquest of northern India, but was given a more fervent form by a number of popular preachers and writers. Of this, two poets in early Hindi, Suradas and Tulsidas, provide sufficient testimony. On the other hand, the erotic pastoral poetry with a religious colouring, as initiated by Jayadeva in Sanskrit at the end of the twelfth century, was also continued, and by the end of the fifteenth

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century a large body of poetry of very great excellence had been written in the middle Bengali and Maithili dialects by four poets, namely, Chandidas, Vidyapati, Govindadas, and Jnanadas. It is not known if this poetry was in any way connected with the actual practice of Vaishnavism in Bengal. In any case, the cult itself, even if it existed there, did so in a very weak form, and was not brought to life until Chaitanya revived it. Therefore this poetry of the loves of Radha and Krishna had better be regarded as secular pastoral poetry, despite the religious formulas which were inserted at the end of the pieces to connect them with Krishna.

Chaitanya, however, read them eagerly and continuously, and imbibed all their passion. On the one hand, he brought the strong erotic feeling present in this poetry into the love for Krishna preached by him, and, on the other, made this corpus of lyrics part of the new Vaishnava literary canon. This gave a new dimension to the cult of Krishna. This was a revolution in the religious life of Bengal, for it had reached a stage of dry formality at the higher social level and triviality at the lower. The most recondite form of priestly pursuits was to be found in the study of *Smriti* (Hindu sacred law) and philosophy, more especially logic *(Nyaya)*, in both of which Bengal and Mithila had pre-eminence. But both the pursuits were formal, scholastic, and incapable of touching the heart. On the other hand, practice was confined to the performance of the elaborate rituals of Brahmanism. At a lower level was the worship of the minor deities of the common people like the goddess of birth (Shashthi) and the goddess of snakes (Manasa or Vishahari).

The followers of Chaitanya were perfectly conscious that they were rescuing the people of Bengal from a state of religious decay. Brindaban Das, his first biographer, expressly referred to the state of religion in order to explain the reception of the message of his master by the people. He said that Chaitanya was wholly misunderstood by the orthodox Hindus of his times on account of his ecstatic behaviour. He was given to shouting, roaring, dancing, and crying from religious excitement, and nobody understood that. People at large, he added, only knew the rituals of daily worship. Some worshipped Shashthi, some Manasa, and others Mangal Chandi (a popular form of Durga who confers welfare), and they took great pride in doing all this. Brindaban Das

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also referred with disgust to yet others who worshipped demons with meat and alcoholic drinks. This was, of course, a reference to Tantric worship. The whole world, Brindaban said, was sunk in darkness *(tamas)*. The aversion of the followers of Chaitanya to the orthodox pundits who specialized in sacred law and philosophy was greater because they were the most determined opponents of their master. They poured scorn on these men as 'sophisters' with Rabelaisian contempt and derision. In fact, argument, according to the school of Chaitanya, was the great enemy of faith.

To this world Chaitanya brought a passion which created not only enthusiasm for religion, but also an exuberance which was orgiastic. In his own religious feeling the strongest element was eroticism, whose precise character as it existed in his mind has to be explained. He felt a love for Krishna which went beyond Radha's adulterous love, because in spite of the keenness which the awareness of adultery gave to it, mere adultery was not sharp enough for him. At first his love for Krishna resembled the perfervidness of a young girl who had fallen in love with a man but, though erotically excited, had not yet been united with him. Then it sought even greater intensity in a vicarious experience of fornication, that is, in the pleasure found by an unmarried girl in pre-marital sexual intercourse with her lover.

Of this Chaitanya's fondness for a famous lyric in Sanskrit provides striking proof. It runs as follows:

Yah kaumāra-haraḥ, sa eva hi vara!—
  s 'tā eva Chaitra-kṣapā!—
S'te ch'onmīlita-mālati-surabhayaḥ
  prauḍhāh kadambā'nilāh;
Sā ch'aivāsmi; tathāpi tatra
  surata-vyāpāra-līlā-vidhau,
Revā-rodhasi, vetasī-taru-tale
  chetaḥ samutkaṇṭhate.

I also reproduce the translation of the piece I have given in my *Continent of Circe:*

Stole he my maidenhead, and today's husband he!
  Just the same are nights of spring;
Blossoming málati, cadámba's pollen blown
  Scent the self-same heavy breeze;

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I, too, the same, same she!—Still, by Reva narrows,
'Neath a tree in tangled cane,
Ah! on that very spot, for coitus-fantasies
wistful, wistful grows the heart![1]

Now, this poem is quite straightforward in its confession of an awareness of the difference in the intensity of passion between permitted and habitual sexual relations within wedlock and their romantic beginnings in secret meetings in wild places before marriage. How and why Chaitanya established an analogy between this feeling and his love for Krishna is most interesting to see.

One day he was going with the car procession of Jagannath at Puri, dancing, and also shouting at the sight of the idol that he was at last meeting Him for whom he had been burning with erotic excitement. At that time he came upon the lyric quoted above and at once realized that his feeling for Krishna was embodied in it. He said to his followers that only he and one of his disciples, Damodar Svarup, knew the real meaning of this lyric.

This would not be understood without a reference to the legends and iconography of the Krishna cult. Though Puri is one of the great centres of Vaishnavism, the image of Krishna in the great temple is not joined with that of Radha, as it is in all later iconography. In the form of Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, he is shown there with his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra. That is to say, the image is of the Krishna of the *Mahabharata*. This Krishna did not satisfy Chaitanya, who wanted not only a Krishna associated with Radha in a bond of adulterous love, but also a Radha who felt like the young woman of the lyric.

One of the disciples of Chaitanya, Rupa Goswami, was present when Chaitanya found this poem. He at once guessed what was in Chaitanya's mind, and wrote down his interpretation on a piece of palm-leaf. Then he thrust the leaf into the thatch of his own cottage and went off to bathe in the sea. At that time Chaitanya came to see Rupa, and accidentally looking up saw the leaf. He took it down and read what was written on it. He was astonished to find how exactly Rupa had set down his own feelings. He had written a *sloka* (stanza in verse) by way of interpreting the old lyric and put it in the mouth of Radha as a remark to a companion of hers:

[1] See *Continent of Circe*, pp. 142–3.

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The Krishna whom I am meeting at Kurukshetra is the same beloved.
I am also the same Radha.
The pleasure we get from our union is still the same.
None the less, my heart yearns for the woods on the banks of the Jumna,
made joyous by the sweet treble notes of his flute.

Chaitanya was so delighted that when Rupa came back from the sea the first thing he did was to fall on him and give him slap after slap of affection. Then he asked: 'How didst thou guess what was in my mind?' What it meant was that, as Chaitanya felt, Krishna could not be loved with the utmost possible intensity when he was being taken out with pomp and splendour in that procession at Puri, which was like his being with the Kuru clan as depicted in the *Mahabharata*; he could be really loved in the woods of Brindaban where there was Radha and the love was illicit; and not only that, even that illicit love had to be consummated not in adulterous sexual intercourse alone, but in fornication on the part of a virgin in love, as described in the lyric. There could be no clearer rejection of the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* and of the *Gita* than was seen in this attitude.

It was natural that the preachings of Chaitanya which was marked by such an intensity of passion should make converts among a people for whom religion had degenerated into mere ritual or sordid adherence to superstition. The outcome was that in Bengal the status given to Vaishnavism by Chaitanya has never been lost. Decisive evidence for the stamp which he left on the religious life of the Bengali people is to be found in the fact that in almost every affluent household there is a family shrine with the images of Radha and Krishna in close embrace. Even the *Saktas*, or worshippers of Durga by sectarian affiliation, have this shrine as a matter of form, though they, being mostly of the aristocracy or the gentry, look down on the Vaishnavism of the professionals and the common people.

But weakening of this Vaishnavism also began quickly, almost with the death of Chaitanya. For one thing, passion of the type as seen in Chaitanya who had a very abnormal type of sensibility, and as preached by him with all the ardour of that abnormality, could never last indefinitely. Human nature cannot tolerate such a thing for a long time. But the dogmatic turn that the movement

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took immediately after his death diluted the passion and made the love for Krishna as felt and preached by him still weaker. This was a strange paradox, because his disciples took the very path in trying to create a philosophical dogma of Vaishnavism which the movement had vehemently denounced and totally rejected. That was philosophizing about religion.

The basic stand of this school of Vaishnavism was that no one could realize Krishna in his life by means of intellectual effort, *tarka* or argument as the original Vaishnavas called it. According to them Krishna was accessible only to love. Yet some of the most eminent followers of Chaitanya took this very barren path of dogmatizing. In fact, their philosophizing was worse than the expositions of the professors of sacred law and logic, because those forms of mental activity were intellectual and could give scope to a good deal of finespun argumentation. But when applied to a form of devotion like that of Chaitanya, which was wholly emotional, philosophizing made the message fall between two stools. On the one hand, it froze the emotion and even ossified it, and, on the other, it could not create any valid intellectual system. Worse rigmarole than what is to be found in the philosophizing of the Vaishnava dogmatists, especially the three Goswamis, Rupa, Sanatana, and their nephew Jiva, cannot be imagined. It is permissible to assign a motive behind this word-mongering, which was to camouflage the frank eroticism of the Vaishnava cult.

But it was accompanied by something worse, a dogmatic exposition of the eroticism as eroticism, which made it vicarious and therefore unpleasant to the last degree. Lust if red-hot is natural and contagious, but if it becomes frigid it repels. The Vaishnava exegetists brought in this frigidity. The pioneer in this venture was Rupa Goswami, who established analogies between the different amorous states of Radha and the states of sexual feeling as systematized in Sanskrit poetics or *Rasa Sastra*. As applied to secular poetry, this systematization was heartless and absurd enough; by being extended to the religious sphere it became repulsive, and only a pretext for indulging in vicarious sensuality by men who had neither the strength of body nor the strength of passion to satisfy lust in action. The discussion of *Rasa (Rasa-ālāpan)* in private was one of the *menus plaisirs* of the Vaishnavas, especially learned Vaishnavas. Certainly, the discussion of the other *rasas* (emotional states), especially affection for children

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(vātsalya), was also included in these discussions. But for the most part they concentrated on the sexual passion. It was like the facetious recreations of salacious old men. This unpleasant streak of eroticism never disappeared from Vaishnavism.

The next reason for the weakness of Vaishnavism was its institutionalization. A whole hierarchy of the Vaishnava cult as preached by Chaitanya was established. It has been briefly described in a previous chapter. This was also accomplished by the kind of monasticism which Vaishnavism introduced. The *maths* and *akharas* with their *mohants* (abbots) created a social order with vested material interests. Furthermore, there appeared in Bengal a special Vaishnava caste. All that tended to make the living faith of Chaitanya a structural extension of the static Hindu society.

Last of all, the message of Chaitanya, so far as it remained living, gradually acquired a class affiliation in Bengal, which was like a wealthy family's going down in the world. When Chaitanya preached, his followers came from all classes of society. In fact, many of his most distinguished adherents came from the pundit or learned class. But in course of time the emotional devotion of this school of Vaishnavism became the possession of the lower castes, especially those who carried on trade. It was not that the aristocracy or the gentry wholly rejected Vaishnavism, but among them it remained a formal cult, whereas among the common people it was emotional. However, this class affiliation also made the emotion crude. It became maudlin and undignified, so as to draw on it the ridicule of the more sophisticated classes or castes.

Devotion to Krishna in the People

Bewildering in its variety as the Krishna cult has been seen to be so far, that however does not complete the story of the cult. Beyond all its specialized forms it also created a general devotion which constitutes a very attractive part of Hindu religious life, interwoven as it is with the world. If one wants to see how the love of Krishna can exist apart from its more extreme forms and bring a soothing influence on Hindu life he cannot do better than turn to Mirabai, a princess of the sixteenth century, and read her songs of devotion to Krishna.

Her existence is historical, though many legendary details have

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been added to it. She lost her husband before she was twenty-four, and also her father, father-in-law, and grandfather. These bereavements made her turn to religion in the specific form of Vaishnavism. She became famous for her songs, which are sung all over northern India by those who worship Krishna in a truly religious spirit. Her love of Krishna is so typical of Vaishnava *bhakti* at its most popular that some idea of it has to be given.

Almost all her songs are quotable, for although their keynote is the same they range over a wide gamut of emotions. I can only quote one:

O Shyam[1] I am afflicted with Thy love.
By the Grace of the Teacher, have I found Thee.
So is my folly driven away from me.
Of this body I will make the lamp and of my mind the wick:
With the oil of love will I fill it and tend its flame day and night.
Wisdom shall be the parting of my hair, and understanding its ornament.
O dusk-faced One, for Thy sake will I sacrifice my wealth and my youth.
Many-coloured is this bed and diverse are the flowers spread over it.
I await the coming of Shyam. To this day He has not come.
The months of *shravan* and *bhadon* have come and with them the rainy season has set in.
The brows, like dense clouds gathered in the sky, send down the tear drops like rain.
Unto Thy care did my parents entrust me. Thou knowest best what is for my good.
No other Master will I dote on excepting Thee.
Thou art the perfect Brahma, O Lord. O let me share Thy seat!
Make Mira Thine own, O Lord: she is bewildered in her separation from Thee.[2]

This is a love which is very different from Jayadeva's. None the less, it is not *agape*, but *eros* raised to the spiritual plane, which is also an expression of love recognized both in Greek philosophy and Christian piety. It has marched towards the goal, but not yet made the ascent from human to divine love, of which both the Neo-Platonists and Dante spoke.

This is a kind of love which a woman can feel either for God or

[1] Shyam (meaning Dark) is a name of Krishna.
[2] The translation is by R. C. Tandan in *Songs of Mirabai* (1934). It must be added that Mirabai's language is difficult, and texts differ.

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husband when the relationship with the husband rises to the spiritual without taking off its feet from the physical base. A great many women, who have never found love of any kind in life, have thought of both husband and God in this way. To illustrate this, I shall quote two dialogues between two young women in each case from two novels by that very great writer of Bengal, Bankim Chandra Chatterji.

In the first of these dialogues one young woman asks another whether she is married. The other replies:

2nd Girl: Yes, after a sort.
1st Girl: What is 'after a sort'?
2nd Girl: I was married to Krishna.
1st Girl: Is he your husband?
2nd Girl: Yes, because he is my master in every sense. So, he is also my husband.
1st Girl: I don't know. You have not had a husband, and you can say that. If you had you would not have been satisfied with Krishna.
2nd Girl: Every woman can love Krishna, for his beauty is infinite, his youth is infinite, his splendour is infinite, and his virtues are infinite.
1st Girl: I do not understand this.
2nd Girl: Why not? Above everyone else, God is the master of us all. The husband is only a woman's master, but God the master of all. Why two Gods, my dear? What will be left for any of them if we divide the little *bhakti* of our little hearts between two Gods?
1st Girl: Nonsense. There is no limit to a woman's *bhakti*.
2nd Girl: There is no limit to a woman's love. But *bhakti* and love are different things.
1st Girl: I have yet to learn that. Both are new to me.

Saying this she bursts into tears, and the other wipes her tears and says: 'I see that you have suffered much, sister. I had no idea of that love.'

The other dialogue takes place between two young women, one of whom is a *sannyasini*, who has left the world and become a *religieuse*, and the other a woman who has had to leave her husband due to very tragic circumstances. After the second young woman had related why she has taken to the road and is going from one place of pilgrimage to another, the *sannyasini* says: 'It seems you have hardly met your husband. How could you love him so much?'

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2nd Young Woman: You love God. Have you seen him?
S.: No, but I think of him day and night.
2nd Young Woman: I too think of my husband day and night, and I have done so since he forsook me when I was a girl. I have worshipped him every day when I have worshipped our god at home. When I have bowed down at his feet I have thought I was bowing to my husband.

There are cases in which human love and divine love come so close to each other that they are not distinguishable, for both partake of divinity as well as humanity. Mira's love for Krishna was of this type, and many women have felt for Krishna like her.

Nevertheless, love for Krishna at every level of Hindu society or with all types of character, has never been the same. One kind of love for him has never been able to shed the old Hindu lust. Thus a substratum of sub-erotic feeling is always lurking in his cult. This sometimes leads women to dangerously ambiguous relationships with their Gurus or spiritual guides.

One thing which should always be kept in mind in dealing with the Krishna cult is that Krishna can be all things to all men. He can give the liar the impudence to utter any lie, the man who serves truth the courage to face the starkest truth, the jester the occasion to exhibit his drollery. But to *l'homme sensuel moyen hindou* he is the most accessible of all his gods. Even an Englishman, who is hated by all modern Hindus as an arrogant imperialist, could write of Krishna in this vein:

> There came up from the water a snatch of a love-song such as the boys sing when they watch their cattle in the noon heats of late spring. The Parrot screamed joyously, sidling along his branch with lowered head as the song grew louder, and in a patch of clear moonlight stood revealed the young herd, the darling of the Gopis, the idol of dreaming maids and of mothers ere their children are born—Krishna the Well-Beloved.[1]

[1] R. Kipling, 'Bridgebuilders', in *The Day's Work* (1898), p. 33.

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Chapter Four

GAIN FROM RELIGION

A PEOPLE who had submitted to the jurisdiction of religion so completely in respect of every activity of theirs in the world had the right to expect religion to offer them an adequate *quid pro quo*. That, the Hindus received in full measure, and it was not simply in the form of material welfare, with which they expected to be rewarded by their gods. With men, the satisfaction of a passion is a far more powerful motive for action than the satisfaction of an interest. So far as anything desired by men can be fully realized, this satisfaction the Hindus obtained from their religion. The two most powerful human desires are for power and for protection, the first being dominant in those whose vitality is above average, and the second in those in whom it is not sufficient for the trials through which they have to pass. The Hindus got all the opportunities for asserting power on the one hand, and, on the other, protection and a sense of security, from their adherence to their religion.

Naturally, the two urges cannot be wholly separated even in one individual, but by and large those who want power and those who look for protection can be found to form distinguishable groups in a society. In ancient times perhaps the Hindus as a community were distinguished more by pride of life and love of power than by inertia and a weak will to live. But in recent centuries the majority has been formed by the weak ones, who yearn after protection and peace of mind and not for power and domination. This division of character was clearly seen in the religious history of the Hindus. Some religious Hindus, who were however a minority, sought power through a religious vocation, but the majority looked only for protection and comfort. The professionals in Hindu religious life, that is to say, those who left the world to devote themselves to religion, were ready to concede that a majority would remain satisfied with protection and peace, but they had a certain condescension for this aspiration, and considered power to be the higher end.

One day this was brought home to me in a casual, but therefore

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all the more significant, way. I was listening to a conversation between an eminent barrister of Calcutta who was also a well-known political leader, and a learned professor of Sanskrit who belonged to the Guru clan of the barrister. The barrister suddenly looked up and appeared to be meditative. Then he remarked as if to himself: 'There is peace in religion.' The pundit, who had a blazing vermilion mark on his forehead, replied with a smile which seemed to be compassionate, though he was the younger man: 'Also power.' The barrister had completed his education in England, the pundit was the product of traditional Hindu learning.

In describing the gains from religion of these two groups, which were of different kinds, the humble ones should be given precedence because they were more numerous than the proud ones. But these were only the 'Commons', so to speak, in Hindu religious life, whereas the proud ones were the 'Lords'.

Part I—Gains for the Commons in Hinduism

Support in the World. The majority depended on religion for support in going through life for which their animal vitality was not sufficient. In the first instance, this was due to the weakening of the will to live brought about by the decadence of all cultures, but also by the exposure over centuries to the enfeebling climate. The two in combination undermined confidence in dealing with the problems of life rationally and created a sense of the inadequacy of human effort. Thus the Hindus came to feel that without help and succour from the gods their life and welfare would always be in peril.

Political history also made its contribution to the sense of insecurity. Political order and stability have always been exceptional in India, and the longest of these exceptional periods was certainly the two hundred years or so of British rule. But even then ordinary people could expect protection solely from the more flagrant or widespread type of oppression. Petty oppression and economic exploitation were continuous. So, even for security of life, and not simply for prosperity, the Hindus had to turn to religion. They did so, not through the promptings of that religiosity which regards all that comes to or is given to man as gifts from God, but from a conviction of its practical urgency.

The general sense of insecurity also created as its particular product an obsession among the Hindus with the idea of being

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surrounded by relentless enemies. No one who has lived in India and come in contact with the life of the people can remain unaware of this. Fear of enemies haunts Hindu life. This fear is, of course, descended from the primitive's fear of all strangers, but was extended to an absurd degree. All relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, even wives and sons, were regarded as potential enemies. Often quite unjustifiably, every Hindu regarded some of his acquaintances as his actual enemies and attributed his failures to their machinations. Beyond them were the unknown enemies, like the unknown gods of the Greeks.

In the social outlook of the Hindus the enemies of a person far outnumbered his friends. So one preoccupation in their life was to disappoint the enemies. So, all well-wishers urged a man not to give joy and comfort to his enemies by quarrelling with friends and relatives. In Bengal, for instance, if two brothers quarrelled a well-wisher would ask why they were providing joy for their enemies. Looking at a healthy child a grandmother, mother, or aunt would say: 'May he grow up like this and put ashes in the mouths of our enemies.' One of the satisfactions of doing well in life for a Hindu was not only to be comfortable himself, but also to mortify his enemies. In the villages the news of a woman in labour would not be given for fear that some enemy would utter spells to delay the birth of the child. This fear from fellow-men was, from the practical point of view, greater than the fear from evil spirits, terrifying as that also was.

Comfort for these fear-ridden men and protection from known and unknown enemies and all evils could come only from religion in the last resort. Thus all religious observances and rites had a protective orientation. In addition, there were particular deities and rites to ensure welfare and security. Some of the rites were meant to enlist support from a god or goddess against evil, others to bribe a mischief-making deity. For instance, in Bengal a goddess called Mangal Chandi or Chandi of Welfare (a popular form of the Mother Goddess Kali) was worshipped every Tuesday in order to secure immunity from evil, and every Saturday Sani (Saturn), who in Hindu mythology is the personified Evil Eye, was worshipped to be bribed off from mischief-making.

Consolation. Hindus would fall back on religion in their sorrows and disappointments as if they had heard the message: 'Come unto

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me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' This attitude is certainly one of those which came into the original Brahmanic religious consciousness from the outside. So far as the ancient Hindus had recourse to religion for combating their troubles they went to it, not for consolation after accepting defeat, but only to stage a return after being reinforced by the power of religion. Hindu philosophers were even more severe. They did indeed declare that philosophy was intended to deliver men from sorrow, but for this end they propounded systems of philosophy of such a character that ordinary Hindus thought that the medicine was worse than the disease. But in Hinduism as it has been known for centuries, consolation in sorrow has certainly been one of the most precious gifts from their religion for its followers.

But though the Hindus wanted consolation, they did not want freedom from sorrow, because sorrow was a real emotional enjoyment to them, and even the grief from bereavement they kept alive as long as they could by hanging up a photograph of the lost father, mother, husband, or child, adding it to the collection of tawdry pictures of Krishna or Kali. Men and women, when cheated by relatives of money, went mad, or turned their back on the world to become religious. This also happened in recent times when there was frustration of an idealistic aspiration. In the course of the nationalist movement, some Bengali revolutionaries turned sadhus in the traditional Hindu manner when they were released from imprisonment or detention and had realized the futility of their method of political action.

A woman, when she lost a child, would become a pathetic *dévotée*, not in the spirit of European women of former ages who took refuge in convents, but simply as the same mother who had recovered her child physically in an image of the baby Krishna. The same type of iconolatry would be exhibited by a barren woman or a woman abandoned by her husband. This is also an appeal of Krishna, added to those described in a previous chapter.

Joy of Life. Furthermore, in recent centuries their religion has been for the Hindus the only source of joy in their life. If the consolation derived from religion was its cool and shady side, the joy which they derived from it must be regarded as the bright and sunny aspect. This must be regarded as the most positive and cheerful side of their religious practice.

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The general tenor of Hindu life is a dull grind into which a living quality is not infused even by the insatiable avarice which is the strongest secular passion of the Hindus.[1] From this only religion provided a way of escape. The many festivals of the Hindus distributed round the year were interludes of real happiness, breaking the monotonous and dreary course of their worldly life. Without these the Hindus would have died of inanition.

The happiness was of different kinds. At one end was the wild breaking out from fullness in the festival of Holi with its sprinkling of colour, horseplay, and ribaldry, which certainly was a survival from primitive life, in which Saturnalias provided a safety valve. But there were other festivals in which the joy, though rising to exuberance, was as normal and refreshing as the rain during the monsoons. The most important of these festivals were the Durga Puja in Bengal, the Dussera in northern India, the Diwali and the Janmashtami everywhere. All of them brought renovation to life.

Till recently every kind of public entertainment, display, music, dancing, plays, or banqueting, was provided by religion, and was hardly ever seen as purely secular amusement. It is necessary to note that movement and excitement in life did not come to the Hindus through their social intercourse, which was extremely formal and staid. These came from their gregarious associations. Thus gregariousness which makes them spill out of their homes in immense concourses is a very strong emotion, almost a passion, with the Hindus. To satisfy this Hindu society has devised a means, and it now goes under the name of *tamasha*, i.e fun of all kinds. Everyone who has lived in India has noticed the irresistible attraction which being in a crowd and watching some spectacle has for Indians. In recent years even the funerals of great national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi or Nehru have had the character of a *tamasha* for those who lined the streets. In old time all such *tamashas* were part and parcel of religious life, and the idea of purely secular amusement was not present in the Hindu mind. They regarded all sensuous enjoyment not associated with the sacred as sinful, and therefore legitimized it by making it part of religion.

English observers who witnessed the festivals and fairs, with

[1] I have described the sorrowful aspect of Hindu life in Chapter 11 of my book *The Continent of Circe*, see pp. 223–34.

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their immense crowds, and the accompanying wildness and complete absence of reverence and self-restraint, were often scandalized, and the missionaries often denounced them as grossly immoral. More especially, the car festival of Jagannath at Puri in Orissa and elsewhere was singled out as an orgy of licentiousness. But an Englishman signing himself 'A.A.' wrote a very sensible article on the subject in *Fraser's Magazine*, then edited by the historian Froude. (See *F.M.*, New Series, Vol. VII, January–June 1873.) He had lived in Calcutta, and himself seen the car festival of Krishna at Serampore near Calcutta, and he wrote:

> The other charge, of obscene and immoral practices, seems even more captious. Of course, in gatherings of such magnitudes as the annual *melas* at Puri, Serampore, and other seats of Jagannath's worship, excess and immorality must to some extent occur; but all reliable evidence has hitherto gone to show that the people are more decent and orderly than any English multitude of the same dimension would be. From a personal observation of three festivals of Jagannath at Serampore, in the vicinity of Calcutta, the second seat of Jagannath's worship, the writer has no hesitation in asserting that, apart from the feeling that the whole ceremonial is essentially idolatrous and barbaric, there is nothing said or done by either priests or worshippers that need offend the taste of the most extreme precisian.

There is, however, one aspect of the matter to keep in mind. Religion among the Hindus was never separated from their general life, and so they saw nothing wrong if provision for sensual enjoyment was made at the fairs and festivals. Just as men went to the religious fairs to sell their goods, so also professional prostitutes moved to them to earn extra money. Everybody knew that, and I have seen that myself. In the town in which I was born and brought up there were on its outskirts licensed houses in which the prostitutes lived permanently. But at the time of the great fair which was held near the town for the swing festival of Krishna they moved to temporary huts on the site of the *mela* or fair. In ancient India, prostitute mothers sent out their daughters properly dressed up to attract rich clients at all festivals.

These large festivals and fairs were very democratic, though many of them were formally held under the patronage of a prince, priestly family, or landowner. Participation in them was spontaneous, and the people who came to them, for entertainment or

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profit, all made contributions to their success in their different ways. The numbers of people seen in them constituted an important element of their success, because all emotions gain in volume and intensity in proportion to the size of the gatherings.

In addition to such large festivals to which people came from a whole province and in some cases even from all over India, there were smaller local festivals which were privately organized by a local prince, landowner, or well-to-do middle-class family, but which, too, were open to all. These were less tumultuous, but not less joyous for that reason. In fact, the joy and happiness which the participants got out of these smaller festivals or fairs had a different quality. For one thing, the feelings were more personal than collective. Besides, they conveyed a greater sense of hallowedness, and balanced the movement and animation with a weight of fullness.

E. M. Forster has described such a festival as held under the patronage of a minor Indian prince in his *Hill of Devi*, and it is an account of Gokul Ashtami, i.e. the festival of the birth of Krishna. I myself as a boy felt this happiness in my ancestral home, and I have described that in my autobiography. By a subtle association the happiness created, or rather had, a material complement, and would certainly not have been complete without that. In my ancestral home, which was a collection of traditional huts, the joy of the Durga Puja was given a touch of exotic glory by the lighting imported from abroad: the lustre chandeliers, sconces, inverted bell-jars serving as oil lamps, as well as Chinese lanterns of coloured paper. The women put on all their jewellery and finest clothes. 'The women in shining silk and loaded with gold ornaments, stood at the sides of the image of the goddess like two rows of ballerinas, making on the whole a well-composed scene even when in motion.'[1] Yet in all this display there was no motive of showing off, present or perceived. Here at all events the extravagant Hindu adornment became a part of devotion, as if it was only an offering to the gods.

I do not think I can convey the spirit of tacit happiness in these smaller festivals better than by translating from Bengali the description given in a book published at the beginning of this century of the worship of a minor goddess, Shasthi—the goddess of births who is shown as riding a cat, the symbol of prolificness.

[1] *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* (1951), pp. 68–9.

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In the villages she is worshipped outdoors, under a banyan or a peepul tree. This is the description:

> Most of the women who were there had come in their best make-up and adornment, and were gathered under the tree. They had in their hands trays laden with incense, lamps, and food offerings. The priest had taken his seat, with all the vessels of worship arranged about him. The women stood near and watched. The low and sweet hum of their talk filled the shrubbery. Some of them had nose-pendants, some nose-rings; their bangles tinkled, silk saris rustled in the wind; the scent of hair-oil filled the air. The foliage above them was so dense that the sun in the sky could not see their faces lit up by a peaceful contentment. A little girl in blue was leaning against her mother and watching the rite opening her large eyes with their lashes shaded with lamp-black even wider. A young mother stood with her baby at the breast, looking by turns at the worship and her baby, and fanning it with the fringe of her sari waved with graceful twists of her bangled wrist.[1]

The life of these women apart from religion was not only trivial, but also disturbed by rivalries and jealousies, and at best it was spiced only by petty gossip. It became transformed at the festivals.

Another extraordinary feature of the religious life of latter-day Hindus was that it was religion alone which kept them in touch with Nature and its beauties. The Hindus in ancient times were as sensitive to Nature as any European could be. But with the centuries they became totally insensitive, in fact so insensitive that they neither would nor could say like blind Milton: 'Thus with the year seasons return, but not to me returns day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn, or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose . . .' Yet religion re-established the contact, in the first instance by making them aware of the cycle of seasons with their varied beauties and by making it identical with the cycle of their *fasti*.

The Hindus then responded to the seasons with something like the response of the plants. Thus it happened that the Durga Puja in Bengal could never be visualized without the accompaniment of white fleecy clouds in a lapis-lazuli blue sky, white plumes of the pampas grass, the changing pink of the hibiscus mutabilis, or the scent of the night-blooming flower of sadness. In northern

[1] Dinendra Kumar Ray, *Palli Chitra*.

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India people say that spring comes in only with the Holi festival, and in Bengal the rainy season begins with the worship of the Ganges.

Furthermore, modern Hindus have no eye for flowers except for worship, for which they are indispensable. At every ritual they have to greet the deity with this phrase among others: *Etena gandha-puspena*—'with this scented flower . . .' In old times they planted flowering trees or shrubs only for getting blooms for worship. When, with British rule, there came secular gardening the neighbours always stole the flowers, and there could be no protest against that. Once, in an unrealistic fit of temper, I sent a complaint to a police station in Calcutta against some boys who had robbed my flowers, and the police dismissed the complaint as absurd, because by that time stealing flowers from another man's garden for the sake of worship had become almost legalized by custom, and objection to it was looked upon as interfering with religious freedom. In any case, in spite of the dubious method employed for obtaining them, flowers entered Hindu life through Hinduism. Only in the south of India the old Hindu use of flowers for adornment persisted.

Personalization of the Support from Religion. Last of all, a special way of obtaining religious support in order to go through life has to be considered. Those whom I have called the 'Commons of Hinduism', that is, those who need and look for this support, have not remained satisfied with an abstract psychological entity from which they could secure help and protection only by an equally abstract psychological effort on their part. They have created a personal incarnation of religion, so to speak, in order to make the support from religion as concrete as protection from a powerful person in their worldly life.

This religious protector is the spiritual guide and teacher known as a man's Guru. But this personal Guru is not the traditional hereditary Guru of Hindu families. He is a special Guru for a particular individual, chosen by him according to his judgement. He is always a man who has attained to a high religious status in the world by leading a genuinely devout life or practising nothing better than charlatanry. He usually has a permanent station of his own, known as his *asrama* or hermitage, but he also tours large areas and often the whole of India preaching his message and

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securing followers. These Gurus always come from among those Hindus who have left the world and made religion their vocation or profession, about whom more will be said later. Here the point of view of the followers will only be considered.

Religiously-minded Hindus have always sought a Guru of this type, because it is a Hindu conviction that no right path in religion can be found without instruction, through initiation, by a qualified guide. Therefore when a man or a woman has chosen a Guru he or she also follows his directions without question, surrendering all his or her spiritual and moral freedom and judgement. The extent to which this is done is astonishing, and the subserviency is not paralleled even in the political sphere where the Hindus have always submitted to autocracy. In fact, they become almost slaves of the Gurus. They hang up portraits of the Guru in their homes, and not only worship the Guru as if he was the deity, but also sanctify their food by offering it first to the picture of the Guru. The most remarkable thing about this cult of the Guru is that in recent years it has become more widespread than ever before, though every other aspect of Hinduism is losing its hold. This is particularly true of the class which has received Western education and lost religious awareness in all its most elevated aspects.

But there is no doubt that those who submit to a Guru feel morally and spiritually stronger, and acquire a confidence in facing the problems of life they never had by themselves. The relationship between the Guru and his disciple is very much like that which existed between the liege lord and his vassal in the early age of feudalism. This is another illustration of the tendency in Hinduism to humanize all religious ideas and practices.

Part II—Gains of the 'Lords' in Hindu Religious Life

The Hindus who left the world and adopted a religious life or vocation lost nothing by giving up worldly occupations and cutting themselves adrift from society. On the contrary, they ensured an alternative means of livelihood which was as satisfactory as any in the world and which brought even substantial wealth to many of them, and besides it brought the fulfilment of two desires which drive all men who are endowed with a strong and assertive personality, namely, the desire to possess power and the desire to have freedom. Actually, the aspiration after freedom is also a

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form of the desire for power. What the Hindu holy men got from religion was the power to dominate over other men, and to be themselves free from domination by others. The two aspirations have to be considered separately.

Enjoyment of Power. In every way the power which came to Hindu holy men through religion resembled the power of those who had it in the political sphere. For this reason these men, taken as a body, could be regarded as the religious counterpart of a secular ruling order, with one important difference. The secular rulers shouldered the responsibility for protecting the life and property of their subjects, whereas the religious rulers had the advantage of keeping all the practical gains from power to themselves, giving nothing more than psychological confidence to the men whose minds they dominated.

However, both the classes acquired power in the same manner. In the latter half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, all British observers noted with some surprise how easy it was in India for any exceptional man to rise high in life on the strength of his talents alone. Many rose to the status of prince and minister from lowly and even menial stations. In fact, while Hindu society retained its natural functioning, that is, allowed power to find its natural outlets and achieve its natural aims, it could be said that a man who had the necessary aptitude and capacity within himself, carried the sceptre of a king in his *jhula*, i.e. shopping bag.

A parallel career could be pursued through religion. If a man had the strength of character to pursue it with vigour, the same kind of power, prestige, and domination over men could be obtained by him. Actually, it was easier to acquire and keep the power obtained through religion because it was purely psychological, and did not require the collaboration of other men or the maintenance of an army or a body of officials. Besides, when obtained, the position was never lost by any holy man.

Of course, in order to reach such a position of authority, the holy man had also to acquire a reputation for possessing occult power by means of which to work miracles. Stories of such powers in the sadhus is current all over India, and even highly educated people believe them. As a rule, no exalted religious status is admitted in a man who has not an aura of the occult. But the

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better type of sadhus regard this only as a means to an end and their reputation for working miracles as a secondary instrument of domination. Some holy men even frankly declare that their supernatural tricks are only tools of the trade, to be employed against the ignorant and the *vulgus profanum*. They are intelligent enough to be aware that their power is really the domination of superior minds over common minds, and they relentlessly press this advantage.

Thus these men always have the same collective homage and command the same obedience as the secular rulers. In the case of many, the worldly appanage of power has not been less impressive than that of a prince. Anyone who has seen the processions at the head of which great religious personages enter a city, often on richly caparisoned elephants, will bear testimony to the worldly grandeur of the princes of the Hindu religion. In one respect their power is more complete, for with the power they exercise over the minds of a whole populace they are also comparable to great demagogic political leaders, and with this power they try to control the private life of their followers, both as individuals and in families, and succeed in a manner which the rulers cannot achieve. In fact, their power extends to places beyond the reach of political power. It is perfectly natural, therefore, that the holy men in India are invariably addressed as Maharaj or Great King.

This psychological power is exercised more completely over women, who usually find the holy men irresistible. Whenever anyone goes to see a holy man he will find him surrounded by a crowd of women, mostly young, and many of them will be seen to be ministering to his bodily comfort by massaging his feet or fanning him. There can be no doubt that there is a para-erotic streak in this homage, and at times the relationship goes very much further, and if the holy men choose to be sensual the women do not scruple to surrender their honour and chastity to them. Men also obey them implicitly, and will be guided in their worldly affairs, especially in respect of the marriages of their sons and daughters, by their Gurus. Many of these Gurus have an unlimited pride of power and even arrogance. Normally, however, their power is so undisputed that they feel no need to be aggressive. The wiser holy men usually exercise their power with moderation.

Nevertheless, even when genuinely religious and seeking

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religious satisfaction only, these men are never less avid for fame and recognition than other ambitious men. I shall give an example of this. In 1900 there came to Max Müller at Oxford a genuine holy man from India who had a high reputation in his own country, but on coming to England he gave vent to his indignation and disappointment. He said: 'I had come to teach men the subtle enigmas of existence. However, England is like a poisonous fruit, fair and attractive to view, but full of deadly juice.' The poor man had assumed that his fame must have preceded him from his country to England, and he had expected to see big crowds at Victoria Station come to receive him. Instead, he was stranded there with his pots and pans and chela (disciple) until a porter took pity on him, and after ascertaining what he was, sent him with a shrewd hunch to the Society for Psychical Research, which sent him on to Max Müller. This new traffic in 'Light from the East' had begun with Swami Vivekananda's famous speech before the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, and it has now become a regular trade to exploit the gullible and the superstitious in the West.

Thus Hinduism offered to those who had the capacity to use it in this manner, a real alternative to political power, for which all persons with a developed urge for self-assertion yearn, but which they cannot secure owing to a lack of political aptitude. This often kept within the fold of the Hindu religion those very men who could be expected to be repelled by religion on account of their pride of life, lust of the eyes, and lust of the flesh. Thus even in its apparent unworldliness the religious vocation maintained the unbreakable link between the world and religion.

Gift of Freedom. Hinduism also offered a splendid opportunity for leading a life liberated from all the obligations, constraints, and compulsions which weighed on the existence of the Hindus in the world. Its appeal was not likely to be less strong than the attraction of power for those who wanted such freedom, and, as I have said, the desire for power and desire for freedom are very closely connected. Of course, this was very much a matter of temperament. But those who renounced the world to become sadhus, got from religion a very comprehensive freedom. In fact, the freedom they obtained comprised all the four freedoms preached by President F. D. Roosevelt, but were realized more fully by the

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sadhus through their wandering life than by any secular pursuit of freedom. The sadhus had full freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, and, above all, freedom from want and freedom from fear.

First, there was complete freedom from the compulsion to work for food. The sadhus freed themselves from the curse: 'By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread.' The wandering sadhus could get food everywhere and from everybody. If need arose they could commandeer it. But in practice nobody would think of denying them food. The sedentary sadhus had food brought to their huts by the villagers.

The second freedom was from the bondage to soil which agriculture has imposed on man. They had no need to be tied to land and remain stationary on it. It was not simply that they had recovered the life of the nomads, they were free even from the necessity of keeping and feeding the animals on which they lived. In reality, theirs was the freedom to wander, which was the heritage of the herbivorous wild animals.

After that they were free from the compulsion to find houses and wear clothing. It was no sorrow to them that, though they were sons of man, they had nowhere to lay their heads. They could lay them anywhere. And in regard to clothing their freedom was so complete, and so admitted on all hands, that they could laugh at the Western talk about going back to nature through nudity, regarding such gestures as comically affected and self-conscious. With their nudity they impressed even the Greeks who practised occasional nudity.

Lastly, they had no need to stay anywhere longer than they pleased. They had recovered man's migratory life without the necessity of having a goal for their migrations. Thus the sadhus acquired an insatiable *Wanderlust*. One sadhu, whom Warren Hastings patronized, travelled through Afghanistan and the Caucasus to Moscow, went from Moscow to Peking overland, and then came back to Benares through Tibet.

These freedoms were freedoms from all the elemental compulsions and restraints on human beings. In addition, the sadhus acknowledged no social ties or social obligations. Once they had adopted a sadhu's life, they would not even mention their original social ties or their original names. The breach with society became complete, though society was not free from them. For once society

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was totally beaten by individualism. If Rousseau had seen the life of our sadhus he would have written: Man is born in chains, but he can be free.

Any sadhu even now can say to a man who remains in the world what a Corsican bandit did to the hero of one of Prosper Mérimée's novels:

> How can you be insensible to the charm of absolute liberty under a fine climate like ours? With this self-preserver (he pointed to his gun) a man is king everywhere. He can command, redress wrongs . . . This is a most moral amusement, and agreeable to boot, which we would not refuse to ourselves by any means. Can there be a finer life than that of a wandering knight, when the man is better armed and more sensible than Don Quixote? Believe me, nothing else is comparable to the life of a bandit.[1]

Actually, the sadhu could claim more. He was not an outlaw, dependent on his gun. His tongs, brass pot, and ashes were enough. What was not less important, and perhaps as alluring as the other rights the sadhu had, he could become free even from the workings of his conscious mind by being wholly unrestricted in his use of cannabis.

There must have been a particular reason to make the natural aspiration for freedom take this special channel in order to satisfy itself. As members of Hindu society, the sadhus wanted to recover freedom not within the social framework but outside it and at the same time to preserve all their claims to social support. The nature of Hindu society drove them to it. It was authoritarian, and the authoritarianism had become self-generating in it. It imposed an inescapable regimentation on its members from one end of India to another, so that Hindu behaviour became uniform all over the country. The most coercive aspect of the regimentation was the rule of life enjoined for a Hindu, which even in regard to the routine of daily life was a jumble of injunctions and taboos. In respect of obedience to the restrictions imposed by the caste system the coercion was even more ruthless.

After that there was the coercion exercised by opinion. No people regulated all their conduct with such abject obedience to the opinion of his neighbours and relatives as the Hindus. Even when they abstained from immoral actions the restraint came more from the fear of neighbours than from moral scruples.

[1] Speech of the bandit Castriconi (the Curé) to Orso in *Colomba*.

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All this virtually crushed the desire for freedom in those Hindus who remained in society, and made their social and personal life in all its major aspects, the life of uncomplaining slaves. The only safety-valve left to them was in the freedom allowed for petty indiscipline and anarchy, which no more affected the rigidity of Hindu society than dust affects the solid structure of the earth's crust. It was on account of the hold of authoritarianism on Hindu society that the more intractable spirits sought freedom by going out of society altogether. They thought that they would not only gain freedom thereby but also make it inviolable by affiliating it with religion.

In creating this affiliation the Hindu sadhus only extended the rule of life prescribed for the Hindus by their sacred law. According to it, the life of a man was divided into four stages: first, that of the devoted student; second, that of the dutiful householder; a third stage of retirement to the woods for moral and religious contemplation; and the last stage in which the man became a wandering sadhu without any tie with anyone, obtaining his food by begging. This last stage is generally regarded by modern interpreters as the stage of renunciation, but in reality it was the stage of release from the crushing burden of Hindu life in the world. The sadhus made this stage their whole adult life and lost nothing by it.

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EPILOGUE

HINDU SPIRITUALITY

AFTER reading the account of Hinduism offered in this book its readers are likely to be so overcome by a sense of its inadequacy that they would perhaps apply to it a well-known cliché, worn out though it is. They would say that it is the play of *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark, because the account has left out what everybody nowadays looks upon as the truly religious content of any religion, namely, its spiritual message. Hinduism, more especially, has been credited with an exalted, rarefied, and esoteric spirituality in the West, and it is this Western myth of Hinduism which has attracted to it both sincerely religious people and pedlars of religious charlatanry. I am therefore bound to be accused of leaving out the most important part of the religion.

I have no right to resent this charge, for the omission is deliberate. In the body of the book I have described Hinduism as a means of living in the world with the help of supernatural agencies, and I have also suggested that the Hindus never took any other view of their religion. But the significant point is that Hindu spirituality so far as it has any existence can quite naturally be brought within the worldly framework of the religion. It is this which gives to Hindu spirituality its special quality. In this concluding essay this aspect of Hinduism will be considered.

As a preliminary, however, the notion of spirituality has itself to be defined, and it is not identical in all religions. Just as the current conception of religion is derived from Christianity, so is the current conception of spirituality. In it the notion has reached its full development from the seminal utterances to be found in St Paul in such phrases as 'spiritual gift' (Rom. 1:11), 'Ye which are spiritual restore such a one' (Gal. 6:1), 'spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12), or 'to be spiritually minded is life and peace' (Rom. 8:6). This kind of spirituality is concerned with what is called soul, an entity quite distinct from the body, in which it only sojourns temporarily. Starting from an antithesis between the *carnal* and the *spiritual*, between the *flesh* and the

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spirit, Christian spirituality has travelled a long way. It has a long history behind it as well. The whole process of its evolution has to be examined briefly in order to bring out the true character of Hindu spirituality.

All spirituality, including the Christian, springs from a psychological urge which from the same Christian point of view is the most unregenerate in man. In the language of Christianity, the urge behind all spirituality may be described as a combination of *concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vitae*. To put it simply, what is now known as spirituality is the product of man's love of life or, as seen from the outside, the product of his unwillingness to submit to the laws of nature and biology. Aware of the limitations on his existence and powers imposed by these, man has persistently refused to submit to them, and has tried to circumvent them by creating a subjective world in which his existence will be eternal and his aspirations unobstructed. Thus, from the point of view of Nature, man is the Revolting Angel, driven by a superb arrogance.

Among the limitations, that which man has resented most and desired most eagerly to overcome is, of course, death, which puts an end to his existence as an individual. As it happens, he remains almost at the animal level in regard to the death of other men, for it does not affect him very deeply or for long. But he is seized with panic at the idea of his own death, and that drives him almost mad. Yet, to all appearance, death is inevitable and inescapable. Haunted by his fear of it, man has tried to get rid of his sense of impermanence and insecurity by creating a double of physical life, or in other words, by conceiving of life as an external indestructible element which enters and leaves the destructible material body. Through this belief he has established the diuturnity of his self, which is a contradiction to biology but not to religion.

This has created that image of life, as bounded by the two earthly events of birth and death, which was evoked by the Northumbrian nobleman who recommended the adoption of Christianity as a means of making it worth living: 'O King,' he said, 'the life of a man is a sparrow's flight through the hall when you are sitting at meat in wintertide. So tarries for a moment the life of a man in our sight, but what is before it, what after it, we know not. If this new teaching tells us aught certainly of these let us follow it.' There can be no doubt that the most powerful

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attraction of Christianity came from the idea of resurrection and the promise of eternal life.

The idea of a disembodied existence as real as the bodily one, has been derived from the observed facts of breathing when alive and its cessation at death. They have given rise to the notion that something independent of the body comes into it and goes out of it, and that though it is imperceptible to the senses, it has continuity as an individual personality independently of the body. It is significant that the words which stand for this incorporeal personality are in many languages the same as those for breath.[1]

The idea that the self continued to live as a spirit or soul was bound to be applied to all men, though not to animals, and also to lead to the belief that all these disembodied spirits formed a community in an imaginary world which was a double of the material world. A further extension of the idea was seen in the creation of beings of the same incorporeal type but who existed independently and constituted an immortal order with powers similar to those of man but unlimited in their exercise. To them men gave the name of gods. There was one more extension of the notion of incorporeal beings made in the image of man. This was seen in the personification of the forces and phenomena of nature. One cannot, of course, be certain that these different classes of mental creations were a sequence, instead of being simultaneous in appearance. But in any case they are closely connected, and thus they cannot be separated. In their combination they have created a complete supra-mundane and supra-natural order. To remain continuously in contact with this order was spirituality in its most elementary and basic form.

But Christian spirituality rose far above this foundation and even hid it under its superstructure. In this developed form spirituality transformed both the supra-mundane world and man's relations with it. The Christian transcendental world became the repository of all the highest moral ideals of man in their realized form and it was also placed under a divinity, the Christian God, who became the embodiment of a perfection so absolute that it was regarded as unattainable by man, although the ideal itself was man's creation. He could only submit to that perfection in a spirit of humility, devotion, and adoration.

[1] It might be pointed out that the Greek word for 'spiritual' is 'pneumatikon'.

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Spiritual life was the mental existence of man placed in perpetual contact with the transcendental world created by his own mind, and also the regulation of his worldly life by the light of that world. To live like that was to be the recipient of grace and to be blessed. Furthermore, in this type of spirituality whatever perfection or strength was within the reach of man was not only attainable solely through a gift of grace, but had also to be accompanied by a conviction of man's inherent weakness (*astheneia* in Greek and *infirmitas* in Latin), so that the idea was established that strength for a Christian had to be made perfect in weakness.

Thus Christian life when lived in the Christian manner naturally generated a revulsion from the world, and also a sense, not only of its transience, but also of its vanity. In those cases in which the psychological contact with the transcendental world was at its closest and most intense, it produced a bodily effect, and this combination of mental and bodily reactions produced that brand of religious sentiment which has come to be known as mysticism. This was the most concentrated form of Christian spirituality.

There can be no doubt that this particular form of spirituality developed from its original starting point of an unresolvable conflict between the spirit and the flesh, has enriched the human mind. It has added a new field of activity to it, which is partly self-contained and partly overlapping with the intellectual and moral fields. It has thus added a new quality to the activities within the latter fields. As a result, there has emerged an ampler human mind which is a triad of intellectual, moral, and spiritual activities incapable of being wholly separated into its constituent elements. The Christian faith has never been based on a rejection of reason, it has taken its stand on a superior reason, a *raison raisonnante*. Pascal's proclamation of a great gulf between the order of reason and the order of charity was due to an extreme position to which he was perhaps driven by his dislike for Cartesianism. But even he admitted the validity of the reason which came from the heart. This type of spirituality has had a profound effect on human behaviour by bringing about a catharsis of his natural impulses.

Hindu religious sentiment never took this line of development, but remained true to the original motivation of spirituality, which was to become free from all the restraints imposed on man by Nature. Thus Hindu spirituality is a pursuit, not of beatitude, but

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of power. It has to be pointed out that in Sanskrit there is no word for spirituality, nor was there any in any modern Indian language until the notion was introduced through the English language. Then with a grotesque and illogical disregard of its original meaning, a Sanskrit word (*adhyātmik* = concerning the self) was made an equivalent of 'spiritual' in English.

This has never been understood by Occidental writers who have dealt with Hindu spirituality. I might illustrate the failure by referring to a famous story by Kipling, that of the saint Purun Bhagat. The story was based on fact. In it the Prime Minister of an Indian princely state, with an outstanding record of public service, becomes a hermit and devotes himself to religious meditation in the Himalayas, living only on the food brought to him by the people of a nearby village. One night he is awakened by the tremors of a landslide and rushing out as a man of action saves the villagers. On this, Kipling's comment was: 'He was no longer the holy man, but Sir Purun Dass, K.C.I.E., Prime Minister of no small State, a man accustomed to command, going out to save life.'

This was all wrong, for in Hinduism the distinction does not exist. In it the minister and man of action Purun Dass, and the saint Purun Bhagat are the same man in two characters and roles, complementary to each other. In the ultimate analysis, Hindu spirituality is interwoven with the cosmos. It is the Old Guard of the world, always held in reserve to be launched into action when a serious crisis arises which cannot be met with any mode of rational action open to man. Or, to vary the metaphor, in his spiritual activities the Hindu is like the dynamo which generates electricity, and in his worldly life the motor which expends it. Hindu spirituality and Hindu phenomenal existence are inseparable. They stand together.

However, a reservation to this general statement has to be made due to the presence in the observable features of Hindu spirituality of a different quality, and that of the kind which is mainly a creation of Christianity. This shade of spirituality is more noticeable in the simple forms of Hinduism preached by the popular prophets. It is, however, an extraneous feature which has remained in Hinduism in its standard form for a long time and has been reinforced twice in the recent centuries.

Partly, this spirituality is a survival from the original form of

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bhakti, in which *agape* had not been transformed into *eros*. Partly, it was also revived by the impact of Islam. This type of spirituality is commonly found among those Hindus who remain conscious of the unseen God who is never worshipped formally but still remains the ultimate God of all Hindus. This God remains a person and receives devotion, and yet he is not invested with a human form.

Awareness of this God and devotion to him was powerfully reinforced among the Hindus as a result of the preaching of Christianity by the missionaries. The Hindus, especially those of the upper castes, rejected the religious system of Christianity, but absorbed a good deal of the idea of the Christian God. This amplified the idea of the unworshipped God and strengthened the devotion to Him to such an extent that what the Hindus precisely felt about him before Christianity came to India cannot be recovered from their spiritual life today in so far as it shows a similarity to Christian spirituality. But there is no uncertainty in respect of the religious status given to the men who exhibit this religious attitude by the Hindus in general. They are regarded as pious men, but never as holy men. In order to be endowed with that status all religious Hindus have to be spiritual in the Hindu sense, that is, either seekers or possessors of supernatural powers. This attitude to holiness is so deeply established that even those holy men who deprecate or even despise the supernatural extensions of their religious life often have to keep up the appearance of being workers of miracles for the sake of status or livelihood.

It must also be kept in mind that the Hindu spirituality which is truly Hindu, that is, when it is a pursuit of power, is not of a single type. The most obvious contrast is to be seen between its introvert expression and its extrovert expression. The first is seen in the Way of Knowledge—the *Jnana Marga*, and the second in the Way of Action—the *Karma Marga*. Both are important aspects of Hindu spirituality and have to be examined more closely.

Of these the introvert form, which is the creation of the Way of Knowledge, has to be considered first, because it is this which has given to the Hindus their current reputation for spirituality. This, too, never broke with the original motivation of Hindu spirituality, i.e. the desire to overcome the limits to human existence and to be free from all the limitations on human power imposed by nature. The prayer in one of the oldest of the Upanishads, which

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I have already quoted, voices this aspiration: 'Lead me from non-being to being.' In the same Upanishad the wife of a sage declares: 'What should I do with anything which does not make me immortal?' To the Hindus truth is what exists.

But in their quest for immortality and indestructibility through the Way of Knowledge the Hindus did not create a transcendental world in which human beings could have eternal life. They looked for indestructibility, not simply for themselves but for the whole cosmos, and hit upon the idea that behind all the manifested phenomena which were subject to change and therefore also to destruction, there existed, consubstantial with them and yet inaccessible to the senses, an unmanifested, attributeless, unchangeable and all-pervasive element which was eternal and indestructible. They also formulated the corollary that phenomena were only particular parts of a general and absolute reality. This idea, arrived at so early in the history of human civilization, was akin to that which has been discovered by modern physics. By its adoption they avoided the setting up of an unresolvable antithesis and conflict between an absolute and eternal reality and transient cosmic phenomena accessible to the senses. This must be regarded as the highest achievement of the Hindu Way of Knowledge so far as it made true knowledge its aim.

But the concept of an absolute and unmanifested reality as preached by the Hindu Way of Knowledge raises two questions. First, how was it hit upon; and, secondly, how could such an idea, purely intellectual as it might seem to be, contribute to religious experience and evoke religious exultation? The two questions are connected, for the emotional effect which the concept produced must have been due to the manner in which its realization came.

One negative answer to the first question suggests itself at once. It is that the ancient Hindus did not arrive at the notion by means of any intellectual process. Neither the technique of experiment, nor the mathematical capacity to deduce theories from observed facts existed in that age. Besides, the theory thus arrived at could not be proved by application to techniques concerned with doing and acting. It has also to be kept in mind that the Hindu Way of Knowledge did not concern itself with objective information for its own sake or for making things; its main preoccupation was with values, and it wanted to discover what mattered and what

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did not in conducting our life. Empiric knowledge, it deprecated to such an extent that one Upanishad said that worldly people pique themselves on their intelligence and learning, but remain in the maze of their ignorance, being like blind men led by the blind. True knowledge for the Hindus was a qualitative assessment.

On the other hand, the discovery of an absolute reality could not have been elaborated from the primitive belief in after-life, which was a deduction from the observed fact of breathing. The Hindus had, of course, their own brand of that kind of notion of after-life, but it was not connected with the line of thinking or feeling of the Way of Knowledge. The commonplace notion of an after-life remained in one channel of Hindu religious life, and the notion of an absolute unchanging reality in another.

How was it hit upon then? A rough and ready answer would be that it was arrived at by intuition. There is nothing improbable in that, for some of the most important scientific theories have also originated, not from conscious deduction, but from flashes of intuition. However, intuition in science is a sort of super-reasoning working below or above the level of consciousness. It is a part of the whole process of intellection. In contrast, the intuition to which I am attributing the Hindu discovery must have been more elemental, something akin to instinct in animals. It has to be regarded as a subconsciously operating faculty of perception brought into play by the combination of an extreme acuteness of the senses with an intensely emotional temperament. Phenomena of nature impinging on such a neuro-psychological constitution could have produced in the human mind when it was young sensations of there being some intangible living force behind the tangible world, as there actually is. These sensations in their cumulative effect could have generated a super-animism.

But this super-animism or even the crude animism of primitive peoples might not have been simply one-sided; that is, only a reaction of the human mind. It is usual to think that animism is only the primitive man's attribution to inanimate nature of the living quality of his own existence. I am, however, inclined to think that there is more to it. To be explicit, I am ready to assume that inanimate nature is only seemingly inanimate, but at bottom it is the outward appearance of an active process, which sends out emanations to beat upon the human mind and generate vague

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perceptions of its real nature. It is logical to assume that the impact would be more powerful before the full development of man's intellectual capacity than afterwards. Expression in speech, however imprecise, was also likely to follow as soon as sufficient linguistic competence was acquired provided that the primitive sensitiveness was not lost with that acquisition. The period of coincidence of the two could not be long. The notions and feelings roused in the human mind at that stage might be described as intimations of immortality granted to mankind in its youth.

That such an interaction can take place even in men living in highly civilized societies with a fully developed intellectual life is seen in the case of Wordsworth. In many of his poems he consciously formulated a theory of the impact of nature on man, and in the well-known lines in his *Tintern Abbey* he described the result of the impact:

> . . . Nor less, I trust
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,—
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

It would be a great mistake to discount or dismiss this statement as mere poetic fancy or conceit. It has to be taken more or less literally as the description of a real experience. With less clearness many others have felt in the same way. Of course, it is not possible to take all the utterances which claim to be intuitive realizations at their face value, because the human mind is an extremely imprecise instrument with colorations of its own, and its responses have a very wide range, some of which project its own prepossessions when under stress. None the less, at times it can register correctly and perceive the existence of something which is not its

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own creation. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to determine which is the correct response and which is not.

The Hindu Rishis or Seers to whom the perception of the absolute reality is attributed also gave utterance to a wide variety of notions, some of which are extremely crude. These would justify one's regarding them as no higher in knowledge and insight than the medicine men of primitive peoples. But they also set down feelings and ideas which came from a sensibility akin to that of Wordsworth. The expression of these feelings and ideas scintillates like precious stones in a bed of common rock in the writings attributed to them. These utterances are very much like poetry, if they are not a particular kind of poetry in themselves. It should be kept in mind that ancient Hindus did not regard the poet as a *mystique manque*, that is, as a man of religion strayed from the path of truth. On the contrary, in Sanskrit the word *kavi*, which later meant a poet in the usual acceptation, was applied originally to the seers who got revelations of truth, and could communicate what they had received to others in suitable language. The Vedic hymns were regarded as such revelations. The Hindus always remembered the religious affiliation of poetry, and described the pleasure derived from secular poetry as something like religious exultation, or as they put it: joy from poetry is the brother of the joy from the perception of the Brahman.

All this may appear to be very fanciful. But we still do not know enough about the workings of the human mind in relation to its environment to be capable of explaining all its reactions. However, even on the conscious plane we find most sensory perceptions producing emotions of the recognized types, and there is no reason to rule out the possibility of more rarefied effects, of which the aesthetic emotion which natural scenes produce is one. On the same analogy contact with nature might produce an excited state of the human mind which can be described as religious emotion. The early Hindus showed in all their writings an extreme susceptibility to the beauty and grandeur of nature. It is impossible to disassociate this from their religious sentiment.

The explanation that I am hazarding about the origin of the Hindu notion of an eternal and absolute reality immune to change and destruction, which is at the same time manifested to the senses as the changeful cosmos, should also explain why the notion could rouse emotions of a kind which can be described as

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religious exultation. What the Way of Knowledge evoked by way of emotion or exultation was only a higher form of the religious excitement displayed by the priest-magicians of primitive peoples. As a matter of fact, all religious emotion is partly physiological, and what is known as mysticism certainly most so. Nobody can deny that religiosity is dependent on the physiological make-up of men, and that it is not within the physical potentialities of all men to be religious. Being religious according to the Way of Knowledge could not be an exception to this general rule.

The followers of the Way of Knowledge could feel that they had conquered death by discovering a form of the cosmos which was imperishable and ever-lasting, and derive joy, not only from that conviction but also from the establishment of an intermittent feeling of oneness with it. But we know nothing of the manner in which the Way of Knowledge in its original form was practised by those who preached and followed it.

There is no historical evidence besides the Upanishads themselves to show when or how the ideas embodied in them formed part of Hindu religious life. Even those passages in them which give expression to mystical exultation are embedded in contexts of philosophical and ritualistic arguments. Neither in the Upanishads nor in other Sanskrit texts is there any description of the religious or devotional life of those who followed the Way of Knowledge. The epics, for instance, often describe the daily life of the sages, and also reproduce their discussions. But these are always shown to be concerned with moral questions or mythology. All this suggests that the proper content of the Way of Knowledge passed out of religious life very soon after it came into existence.

But in so far as it provided a psycho-physiological experience it survived, because on the one hand it could be planted on the practice of the well-known later cults, and on the other could be induced by auto-suggestion and special physical exercises. The desire to continue the experience by means of these is intelligible: the experience was too pleasurable to make those who had once had it reconciled to its loss when the capacity for having it naturally was lost. In order to continue the experience even a faked form of it was sought by the taking of drugs, cannabis more especially.

It is not necessary to describe the philosophical pursuit of the concept of reality formulated by the Way of Knowledge, because

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with that transition it ceased to be part of religious life, though Hindu philosophy too had passion—the passion roused by the sorrows of mankind as its driving power. In later stages it became nothing better than arid exercise of logical analysis. However, the Way of Knowledge survived in Hindu religious life in its modal part, and in this form it continued to be followed till recent times. Its prestige was such that it is still followed, but unfortunately it is also exploited by men who are nothing but charlatans.

In its respectable form, it was followed by men who left the world and lived their life of renunciation as individuals instead of becoming members of the ascetic orders. As a rule, they were not votaries of any of the major cults, but professed to seek knowledge about the ultimate meaning of existence, and remain in a state of joyousness through that knowledge. These men usually assumed or were given honorific titles like Swami (the most common one), Maharshi, Param Hamsa, Mahatma, etc., and lived as recluses, very often in inaccessible places in the hills and mountains. They devoted themselves to contemplation and meditation, and often went into trances or *samadhi*. They claimed to have arrived at true knowledge or ultimate wisdom, and to have found answers to the enigmas of human existence.

But no one has yet been able to find out what their knowledge or enlightenment amounted to, so far as these were spiritual. Normally, they aired almost complete taciturnity, at times giving the reason that what they knew could not be divulged to unworthy persons. If, however, they became vocal at all, their religious ideas could be recognized only as variations on the themes of the Upanishads and similar ancient mystical treatises. It is this reticence of theirs which has created the notion that the deepest Hindu religious message is esoteric.

But when they are social—and they cannot avoid being so altogether because men come to them to receive instruction—they can become loquacious. However, their teaching then is seen to be wholly didactic, and that too in a very commonplace form. Their teaching or preaching consists wholly of the moral ideas which have been current among mankind ever since it became civilized. They are often even trite.

None the less, the value of this moral teaching is not to be underrated. The erosion of moral sensibility is continuous in human societies and it is most so in respect of those simple prin-

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ciples which sustain social life and which seem to be obvious. Therefore these simple principles have to be propagated ceaselessly. This can be compared to modern advertisements urging drinking milk, eating oranges or using soap. When one thinks of these advertisements without taking them as unavoidable accompaniments of contemporary life, one is startled by the thought that civilized human societies should have to be reminded of the necessity for the things they urge on us. But it is so, in regard to hygiene as well as morals. What the cessation of elementary moral teaching can mean is clearly seen in the prevalence of hatred, violence, vice, and dishonesty in the present-day world. Therefore didacticism, even when it is as cloying as advertisements of everyday necessities, is not to be deprecated.

But the practitioners of the Way of Knowledge in Hindu society in recent times could never have exercised so decisive a moral influence if they had not been regarded as men who possessed supernatural powers. All the ascetics and hermits who remained in this Way were credited with such powers, and often they themselves condescended to adopt the tricks of their trade in order to be supported by society, when for themselves they only sought religious experiment. Through its supernatural aspect or coloration, the Way of Knowledge disclosed its links with the spirituality of the Way of Works, which has now to be described.

I have distinguished the spirituality (or rather religiosity) of the Way of Action or Works from that of the Way of Knowledge by characterizing one as introvert and the other as extrovert. The distinction is justified. If the religious life led in the Way of Knowledge is also partly a quest of power, it is so in a passive manner and that power is sought for the inner life of the devotee. That is to say, it gives the devotee the capacity to rise above the termination of selfhood, and the destruction of all things outside the self. In contrast, the spirituality of the Way of Action *(Karma Marga)* is oriented towards action in the form of unobstructed self-assertion. Its object is to acquire the capacity to do things beyond what is within the natural physical and mental powers of man—e.g. the capacity to see into the future, read the minds of other men, control physiological processes, even disregard the laws of gravitation, in short, the capacity to perform miracles.

Spirituality of the Way of Action can therefore be regarded as a specialized and highly intensified form of the general religious

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practices of the Hindus. While the object of the latter was to ensure security and prosperity in the world to the extent they were attainable by natural means, or at best to obtain these in such a measure as could be expected only from luck or special favours of the deities, the spirituality of the Way of Action sought supernatural powers, to be used or not used as the possessor chose. The main satisfaction was the pride of possession.

Yet there was one extraordinary paradox in the methods of this form of spirituality. Although its obvious descent was from primitive magic, and its object the working of miracles, the methods adopted by it to obtain supernatural powers were wholly human. Except that in some forms of this spiritual pursuit incantations were employed, generally speaking it was held that miraculous powers or gains beyond the reach of human effort could be obtained by special physical and mental exercises, one of which was asceticism and self-mortification. Hindu renunciation, asceticism, and self-mortification were wholly different from what these were in Christianity.

From the Christian point of view, the renunciation and asceticism of the Way of Action might be regarded as a pampering of the very urges which these were meant to repress, namely to satisfy all the desires which are generated by the flesh. The whole of Hindu religious and secular literature leaves no room for doubt as to the motives of Hindu renunciation and asceticism. They are courses of action which can be described in the formula—*reculer pour mieux sauter*. These constitute the method of obtaining more and ever more power over men and nature by showing for some time how little one cared for the prizes and enjoyments offered by the world.

There are many legendary tales in Sanskrit which relate how certain sages performed such feats of self-mortification that Indra, the Lord of Heaven, became alarmed. He thought these men would attain such power that they would be able to usurp his heaven. So he sent his courtesans to tempt them, and they invariably brought about the fall of the sages, none of whom came through the trials like St Antony or Buddha. Sanskrit literature also has stories of defeated kings who practised the same type of self-mortification to recover their kingdoms. The story of Uma's penance to gain Siva as husband, already referred to, also reveals the same orientation of asceticism.

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Even in historic times asceticism of this kind has been associated with the acquisition of occult powers of all kinds, including the power of overriding the laws of nature, controlling physiological processes, curing diseases, or foretelling the future. It has never been believed that these powers can be acquired by rational investigation and experimentation, and it has been assumed that they can come only from an esoteric discipline, of which severe self-mortification is a part. As has been shown, this kind of power had as its complement or rather fulfilment, the power to dominate other men. Actually, an appearance of indifference to things that the world has to offer, even without occult powers, has by itself created a moral authority for those who have shown it. As a means of acquiring and exerting power, renunciation has always been so effective among the Hindus that Mahatma Gandhi felt compelled to bring it into politics in order to obtain mass support for the nationalist movement.

This particular kind of religious practice, with its mingling of religious gymnastics and renunciation, has had such a hold on the Hindus, and its observances have been so conspicuous in all their activities, that outsiders have been led by the spectacle to attribute a deep, comprehensive, and esoteric religiosity to them. And this religiosity has been mistakenly associated with the Western conception of spirituality.

It has to be explained at this point that there was also another form of renunciation of worldly life among the Hindus, and that was seen in the Way of Knowledge. However, strictly speaking, that was not renunciation, far less asceticism. It was only living a life of self-restraint away from the distractions of the world. This retired life is extensively described in the epics and other books. These descriptions show that the sages lived normal lives in their families, and did not have to give up even sexual relations. This type of retired life was meant only to help concentration of mind in seeking knowledge.

The distinction between the two kinds of renunciation and their respective purposes is very strikingly illustrated by the story of the enlightenment of Buddha. At one stage of his quest for knowledge he practised severe self-mortification for six years and was reduced by it to a skeleton. But in the end he realized that all this was futile. So, afterwards he led a quiet life of normal regimen and arrived at enlightenment. But in no form of Hindu renunciation

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is there any trace of the religio-moral idea that man's nature is innately sinful and that it must be repressed by severe and painful methods.

There is another question about the methods of the Way of Action in its search of spirituality which has to be faced, even if it cannot be answered satisfactorily. That human beings can gain occult powers by means of magic is, of course, an idea current in all primitive societies. But the Way of Action sought them through human effort, special psychological and physical exercises, and above all by means of self-mortification. So far as the exercises were concerned, the Hindu ascetics could demonstrate that these gave a control over bodily states or processes which went beyond the natural, and therefore this part of their method was empiric. But how did they entertain the idea that self-mortification could secure occult powers for them, whose validity could never be demonstrated? This appears to have been assumed *a priori*.

But a matter of fact explanation for this, too, may be suggested. In Hindu social and family life, refusal to take food or go out and expose oneself to cold or heat is a recognized method of psychological coercion designed to make relatives, neighbours, creditors, or even debtors, yield to one's wishes or demands. Generally, it succeeded.

Bishop Heber, who visited Benares in 1824, left in his journal an account of the application of this method of coercion against the British administration by the people of that city some years before that date. I quote the whole narrative:

> Government had then, unadvisedly, imposed a house-tax of a very unpopular character, both from its amount and its novelty. To this the natives objected, that they recognised in their British rulers the same rights which had been exercised by the Moguls,—that the land-tax was theirs, and that they could impose duties on commodities going to market, or for exportation: but that their houses were their own,—that they had never been intermeddled with in any but their landed property, and commodities used in traffic,—and that the same power which now imposed a heavy and unheard of tax on their dwellings, might do the same next year on their children and themselves. These considerations, though backed by strong representations from the magistrates, produced no effect in Calcutta; on which the whole population of Benares and its neighbourhood determined to sit 'dhurna' till their grievances were redressed. To sit 'dhurna' or mourning, is to remain

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motionless in that posture, without food, and exposed to the weather, till the person against whom it is employed consents to the request offered; and the Hindoos believe, that whoever dies under such a process becomes a tormenting spirit to haunt and afflict his inflexible antagonist. This is a practice not unfrequent in the intercourse of individuals, to enforce payment of a debt, or forgiveness of one. And among Hindoos it is very prevailing, not only from the apprehended dreadful consequences of the death of the petitioner, but because many are of opinion, that while a person sits dhurna at their door, they must not themselves presume to eat, or undertake any secular business. It is even said that some persons hire Brahmins to sit dhurna for them, the thing being to be done by proxy, and the dhurna of a Brahmin being naturally more aweful in its effects than that of a Soodra could be.

According to this custom, Heber went on to relate, notices were sent out to the people of the city and surrounding villages to come and join such a demonstration. The result was described by Heber:

Above 300,000 persons, as it is said, deserted their houses, shut up their shops, suspended the labour of their farms, forebore to light fires, dress victuals, many of them even to eat, and sate down with folded arms and drooping heads, like so many sheep, on the plain which surrounds Benares. The local Government were exceedingly perplexed. There was the chance that very many of these strange beings would really perish, either from their obstinacy, or the diseases which they would contract in their present situation. There was a probability that famine would ensue from the interruption of agricultural labours at the most critical time of the year. There was a certainty that the revenue would suffer very materially from total cessation of all traffick. And it might even be apprehended that their despair, and the excitement occasioned by such a display of physical force would lead them to far stronger demonstrations of discontent than that of sitting dhurna. On the other hand, the authorities of Benares neither were permitted, nor would it have been expedient, to yield to such a demand, so urged. They conducted themselves with great prudence and good temper. Many of the natives appeared to expect, and the Brahmins perhaps hoped, that they would still further outrage the feelings of the people, by violently suppressing their assemblage. They did no such thing, but coolly reasoned with some of the ringleaders on the impossibility that Government should yield to remonstrances so enforced. They however told them expressly, in answer to their

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enquiries, that if they chose to sit dhurna, it was their own affair; and that so long as they only injured themselves, and were peaceable in their behaviour to others, Government would not meddle with them.

At last, the demonstrators got tired and dispersed. But the authorities in Calcutta abolished the tax afterwards. This was the real historical precedent of Mahatma Gandi's application of Hindu spirituality to the Indian nationalist movement in order to secure India's political independence. Naturally, Occidentals, put on a wrong track by his professed admiration for the Bible and Tolstoy, never understood what his method really was. It would seem that the practice of extreme self-mortification to obtain supernatural power was an extension of the social method to religious life.

Whether the men who followed this path of Hindu spirituality actually exercised supernatural powers cannot be asserted as a certainty. But the Hindus believe that they did, and even today people tell stories of supernatural deeds with a perfect conviction of their being true. As to the practitioners, whether they actually possessed any such powers or not, they exhibited extreme confidence and through this confidence could always exert their power on other men. Thus the reputation for possessing spiritual power actually gained through the methods of the Way of Action conferred a power which was a variant of political power, as I have already explained. Thus this type of spirituality never disassociated itself from the world, nor failed to gain worldly advantages.

The final result was that Hindu spirituality arising in both its forms from the cosmos, lost itself in the material cosmos. Of these, the brand of spirituality found in the Way of Action could never have avoided its worldly destiny. But the spirituality of the Way of Knowledge perhaps could. It had arrived at a notion of the universe which was a possible alternative to the subjective transcendental world created by all religions, including Hinduism itself in its less abstruse form. That world, intangible as it was to the senses, had real permanence. Starting from this discovery—that is, the realization that non-material existence could be as real as the material, a religion could have been created which would have been immune to the destructive impact which science has had on conventional religions. But the obstacle was that religion

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is sustained only by passion and never by intellectual concepts. The intuitive adumbration of the real nature of existence at first could arouse religious emotion through bodily responses. When that faculty was lost, the most basic religious discovery of the Hindus passed out of religion and was reduced to philosophy, which was incapable of supporting spiritual life. So Hindu spiritual life became pursuit of power through religion. It is this infatuation with power which has nullified the greatest religious discovery of the Hindus. Perhaps the history of their spiritual effort can be summed up in these lines:

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy,
> But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day.

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HINDUISM
The Anthropology of a Civilization

Madeleine Biardeau

Translated from the French
by
Richard Nice

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Introduction

To aim to present a unified account of a culture and a history as vast as that of India, explicitly linking each part to a single totality, is no doubt a somewhat reckless undertaking. Would anyone dare to define a unit of the same kind within Western civilization, still less presume to embrace the whole of Western history in a single synthesis governed by a few simple norms that can be traced everywhere?

India is, however, a particularly favourable case for an undertaking of this sort. The texts and archaeological remains which it offers extend over a period of at least three millenia; and yet, in spite of a sizeable collection of inscriptions on stone or on copper plates, which have by no means all been studied or even published, this evidence scarcely enables us to reconstruct what one would call a history. It is true that we possess a few chronological references—partly hypothetical and still disputed—but these rare dates are not always particularly significant. In contrast to what has occurred with some other civilizations, we do not, for example, possess any ancient royal chronicle: even the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of Kashmir (twelfth century) cannot be regarded as an exception, composed as it was in that eternal marchland, in contact with the 'Turks' and in an atmosphere in which Hindu norms were constantly flouted. The occasional Greek or Chinese visitors and later Muslim observers provide a few precious landmarks, but these too must be handled with care since they are based as much on hearsay as on direct information.

The paucity of strictly historical data might, on the contrary, serve as a challenge to scholars and exercise their sagacity; this it has indeed done, but on the basis of essentially a-historical material, since the enormous Sanskrit literature which extends through the ages up to the present day operates in the realm of the normative or the mythical or in their service.[1] The *Arthaśāstra*, a treatise on the art of royal governance that is almost unique in its own genre, is

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attributed to Kauṭilya, who is thought to have been a minister of the emperor Candragupta Maurya (fourth century BC). But who would be so bold as to date the text in that period? Estimates range between the fourth century BC and the fourth century AD. The famous Treatise on Love, the *Kāma Sūtra*, is equally ill-dated. As for that vast narrative and didactic summum, the epic of the *Mahābhārata*, it is thought to have been composed over a period of eight or ten centuries straddling the beginning of our era, but one would be hard put to find indisputable arguments to support this. Yet we know that the kings had their bards and their panegyrists, but these streams of eloquence have mostly come down to posterity only in mythic form, the person of the king being itself stereotyped or even reabsorbed into the divine model, as the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. The other epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, more modest in scale, is not even classified by the Hindu tradition in the same literary genre as the *Mahābhārata*, although it too is a royal saga: it is a 'poem' and not a history; it was probably composed over a long period, and the arguments in favour of its being earlier than its literary twin are counterbalanced by evidence of later composition. Only when one comes to recent centuries do dates become more precise, attached to works by definite authors for which at least a relative chronology becomes possible.[2] But by then, the major mental and social frameworks of Hinduism had already been established. Buddhism had been expelled or absorbed, Jainism had withdrawn into itself to resist Hindu cultural pressure, and the tribes had been driven into the least habitable parts of the territory although they too were not allowed to ignore the powerful society which contained them on all sides.

Kingdoms great and small, longlasting or ephemeral, even empires, succeeded one another, but brahmanic India continued to adhere to its own norms; its thinkers and authors—all Brahmans—have given her a fundamentally timeless image, intended in their minds to live eternally, since she was the centre of the world, the measure of salvation, and spoke the language of the gods. That is indeed the main justification for an attempt at a systematic presentation. This endeavour consists in taking literally the desire of a whole society, as expressed by its scribes but also no doubt with a very broad consensus, to present itself as a well-ordered whole, as the realization of a socio-cosmic order which promises it eternity or

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an everlasting renewal. This amounts to saying that change, when it does appear, is only superficial and always refers back to a normative foundation, the one source from which spring the most transient phenomena. It is then a question of adopting this language as far as one can, of entering into this world view, forgetting one's own categories so as to discover those of the Other, accepting that its lines of cleavage are not ours, that its values are distributed in a way that for us is unexpected. Such a perspective in fact does no more than reconnect with the very modern and very Western preoccupations of the historians of 'mentalities'. There is simply a change of scale when dealing with India, because one cannot 'periodize' its history as one does for other areas, or divide it into territories as restricted as those of European countries. The documentation available does not lend itself to this either in quantity or, above all, in content, since it speaks of something other than 'history'. The psychological, the individual, the momentary collective movement escape us—or are they simply absent? A rigorous study of mentalities must in fact take care not to see these lacunae as something negative, as a limit on investigation. On the contrary, they have a heuristic value if they are regarded as indices of what the Hindu will or can say of himself. I do not deny that this is a risky undertaking: how can one be sure that the reduction of the fact to the norm does not conceal the intrusion of a historical contingency the data of which elude us? One cannot hope to make a system of Hindu culture as a whole, *without any remainder*. In particular, this would be to make light of the centuries of rationalizations which the Brahmans have accumulated in all good faith, deceiving themselves before catching us in their trap. More modestly, therefore, I shall endeavour to show the probability of an interpretation by examining it from several angles, not forgetting that the most solid pieces of evidence may themselves prove to be deceptive, that the insignificant anecdote takes on the air of a myth the better to charge itself with meaning. In short, I shall place a wager on meaningfulness, while remaining aware that meaninglessness also exists.

The twofold demand for an overall system and for a meaning immanent in each of its partial manifestations runs counter to an Indological tradition which has been firmly rooted in the West for decades and which has even caught on among contemporary Indian

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misfortune of the times, one—or several—crises. In short, the religion of devotion—*bhakti*—with the sudden promotion of the Vedic gods Viṣṇu and Śiva, sees the light of day because the vanquished have demanded their place in the sun, the silent ones of the Vedas have at last managed to make themselves heard. If the Goddess—of whom the Vedic texts provide only pale sketches—takes on such importance, it is because 'aboriginal', 'Dravidian' cults centred on her, force their way through and win for themselves a place in the most official Hinduism. But the old cleavages are still intact and serve to structure Hindu society: what is 'Aryan' is pure and is the norm, what is not is impure. A social hierarchy based on the sacred integrates the vanquished—the outsiders—at the bottom. Local folk beliefs are irreconcilably opposed to the pan-Indian beliefs advocated by the Brahmans, the cream of 'Aryan' civilization.

So is there a history, at least in very ancient times (second millenium BC) in which people speaking the Indo-European form of languages penetrate into India and, through their Brahmans, draw up the religious texts which will constitute the Veda? Maybe. But what if this seemingly historical structuring only existed in our minds; and perhaps even implicitly took its model from our most recent history? Between the assertion that ethnically and culturally different peoples must have learnt over the centuries to coexist, and the assertion that their cohabitation explains the present-day socio-religious structure of Hindu India, there is a gulf which cannot be crossed without examination. The point has already been made: the most ancient Tamil literature was already aware of Sanskrit literature, and its formal and linguistic properties do not suffice to reconstruct a Dravidian civilization which will therefore remain for us an unknown (as is the idea of *an* Indo-European civilization pre-existing all the realizations of it that can be identified in time and space).[3] Moreover, recent studies of the oral literatures have shown clearly that the history of their monuments cannot be reconstructed in terms of interpolations or successive layers.[4]

But the greatest problem that arises nowadays from the ambition of presenting an India in which the permanent has the upper hand over the changing lies in the progress made over the last few decades first by Western and then Indian archaeologists. Great hopes were

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built up on the excavations of pre-historic or proto-historic sites, some of which were known as early as the Vedas or in the epics and even today have the same names. For the Vedic period, the archaeologists are modest: there is a lack of remains, or of possibilities of carbon-14 dating. But even supposing we had a clear idea of the approximate dates of the Vedic corpus, no significant correlations have yet been found between the two orders of data. Animals, plants, or traces of human occupation of the soil are not sufficient to indicate the presence of populations who only left a religious corpus and whose cultural practices entailed no durable building.

It is true that the archaeologists attribute their meagre results to the excessively small number of sites catalogued and the difficulty of detecting relationships between excavations which are too sporadic. One may think, however, that there is a more fundamental difficulty, as would be shown by exploration of the epic sites. There is all the more reason to relate the search for a hypothetical Vedic archaeology to the excavations inspired by the epics, inasmuch as the two presumed states of culture must have partially overlapped in time, to judge from the texts alone. On the other hand, there is no reason to think that the material culture of the Vedic authors and the epic authors evolved significantly: iron, horses, cereals, etc. figure in both sets of texts. But what is currently yielded by an exploration of the sites? In the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we have a seemingly firm starting-point, since the capitals of Ayodhyā and Mithilā, north-east of the Ganges valley, are still major centres of population. In the case of the *Mahābhārata*, Indian scholars have absolutely no qualms about identifying the present-day sites of Hāstinapura and Indraprastha (modern Delhi) with their epic counterparts. Kurukṣetra, the site of the great battle itself, is a place of pilgrimage; even so, Indians are bewildered by the present insignificance of the site. At Ayodhyā and Mithilā the existence of modern cities has greatly impeded progress in archaeological surveying of the areas. It is known that the land has been occupied for a very long time, but we are at a loss to say much more. As for the *Mahābhārata* capitals, the problems here are very similar to those which were faced by the first archaeologists at the site of Troy, archaeologists who had read Homer. A large number of strata, indicative of human occupation and distinguished by datable

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pottery sherds and tools or weapons, allow us to go far enough in India's proto-history to offer hope of yielding evidence about the period corresponding to the epic. But the fact has to be faced: no dwelling of any but the village type has ever been found at any level: no palaces, no cities, and certainly no battlefield. It would seem, then, that there is nothing to be gained by holding to the theory that the events related in the *Mahābhārata* are contemporary with such and such a pottery type found at a given level at Hāstinapura. There is no proof whatever to support such a correlation, and even if there were, it would tell us but little about the characters who figure in the epic.

But these are not the most difficult of our problems. The great Indian pre-historian, H. D. Sankalia, carefully sifted through the *Rāmāyaṇa* and then not only denounced the improbable and clearly imaginary scenes (our 'mirabilia') contained in it, but also condemned what he considered to be the ancient authors' ignorance of Indian geography. He therefore hypothesizes that behind a late, erroneous *Rāmāyaṇa* lies an original *Rāmāyaṇa*, characterized, in particular, by a coherent geography, i.e. one recognizable to a modern reader. For him, Lanka is not Sri Lanka, the sea is only a lake, and the bridge slung by the monkey Hanumān between dry land and the island merely a commonplace walkway built between the edge of the lake and an islet, by an aboriginal population represented, of course, by the monkeys. One of the main props of the demonstration and of the definite location of the *Ur-Rāmāyaṇa* is that *sāl* trees abound in the forests where the monkeys fight and that *sāl* only grow in a quite determinate region of India, in the northern part of the Deccan, a long way from Sri Lanka. As for the later narrators, they were simply talking about things they knew nothing about. The same argument could of course be applied to the *Mahābhārata*: the conventional descriptions take liberties with geography—one need only try to trace the course of the Sarasvatī river to understand this—and whereas the palmyra tree, *borassus flabellifer*, does not particularly flourish in the northern plains of India where the action is set, this tall, straight-trunked palm-tree is constantly evoked in varying contexts. Should one therefore construct an *Ur-Mahābhārata*, in which the scholar of today takes the place of yesterday's bard in order to rediscover the original bard?

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It is no doubt more appropriate—and it is the position I have adopted in this book—to follow the hypothesis put forward some time ago by Georges Dumézil, if not with exactly the same terminology: whatever the advances of archaeological research in India, one will never find sufficient traces of the epic events or their cultural context, simply because these are mythical events without even the most elementary historical basis. Without a doubt, a certain relationship obtains between the imaginary and the real, but it is with archaeology in the strict sense of the word, with its buildings and its sculptural representations, that the greatest potential lies for delineating such a relationship. But by the time that any archaeological data appear for us to contribute to our analysis, the principal themes of the epics have already been fixed. One then has to reverse the perspective: when a *sāl* tree or a wine palm is mentioned, this is not necessarily because it is part of the everyday surroundings of the poet—quite certainly an educated man, a Brahman rather than a bard—but rather, perhaps, because it belongs to his mental landscape by virtue of the symbolic meaning or meanings that are attached to it. More generally, the regions referred to are not evoked for the sake of their real position on the map (*sic*), but on account of the positive or negative values with which they are charged. What is true of the epic is no doubt even more valid for even the most explicit Vedic texts, those which abound in the proper names of persons and places; if these had any historical foundation, we can be sure that it has long since been lost when the epic narratives re-use them to say something else. So whatever the specific history of these texts, one can argue that it is forever impossible to reconstitute it, and that in any case this is not the most important task. In one way or another, by a more or less distant reference and through endless re-interpretations (including, therefore, those of Indian archaeologists, historians or anthropologists), these texts live on in the Indian collective consciousness. What do they have to say? We seek safety in sense, in spite of the moments of apparent non-sense.

The epic and Vedic authors have moreover provided the means of access, if not to their system of problems—that would be an excessive ambition—then at least to a way of looking at things that is closer to their own. When they use the word *ārya*—from which we have coined 'Aryan'—what are they referring to? The answer is

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not simple, because there is no single answer, but the most fundamental texts are nonetheless very clear: to be ārya is first of all to behave in a particular way, governed by precise rules that are taught on the one hand by Revelation (the Vedas), and on the other by all the commentaries and the practice of those who have closely studied that Revelation and been guided by it—the tradition, therefore, conceived initially as an oral, lived tradition. By implication, to be ārya one has to be a member of the three higher 'classes' who are duty-bound to study the Vedas and to use the services of a Brahman master or priest. In the epic, the epithet is most often applied to the warrior prince, since he is the central figure. But it cannot be exclusive, for the warrior prince could not be ārya if he did not live in the company of learned and pious Brahmans, or if he were not surrounded by subjects who supply him with the wealth he needs in livestock, cereals and precious metals. We shall see that one has to go further.

But the term ārya also has a possible geographical connotation, although this is less firmly fixed and ultimately non-essential. The maximum extent of ārya country is that given to it by the *Laws of Manu*, i.e. the whole of the Indus-Ganges plain from one ocean to the other between the Himālayas and the Vindhya mountains which mark the northern limit of the Deccan plateau. But, within this zone, there are distinctions to be made which imply a hierarchy of the ārya themselves; it is well known that the requirements of purity and of ritual practices are such that the various degrees of shortcoming also determine degrees of 'āryan-ness'. Women's morals are an important element in this evaluation: they must be faithful and chaste. The most āryan of lands would thus be the area encompassed by the Ganges and the Yamunā. It is so difficult to be ārya that it gives a fragile status that is easier to lose than to regain. Although birth guarantees, in principle, the possibility of brahmanic or *Kṣatriya* or *vaiśya* status, it is not sufficient to preserve it. Hence the interest of this shifting notion of ārya, which designates not so much a given human group as a life style which is essential to it and which requires a certain natural environment; in particular, one has to be able to offer sacrifices, and the region in which sacrifices are offered is the land 'where the black antelope roams free'—apparently the dry northern plains. The black antelope is indeed linked symbolically to sacrifice, as certain myths and ritual

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practices indicate, although it is not possible to explain this in any definite way. The symbolic aspects are too striking for one to be satisfied with a purely ecological origin.

Opposed to the ārya are all those who are not ārya: first, the *śūdras*, the 'class' which groups together the servant castes, in particular the crafts, and then the *dāsas* who would later become the 'household slaves', but who, in the Vedic texts, are no doubt first and foremost the non-āryas, the barbarians, those who have no place in the brahmanic religion, the enemies. However, since wars are waged among āryas as well as between āryas and dāsas, we cannot place āryas and dāsas in opposition to one another as enemies pure and simple; nor can we simply refer to the latter as potential victims of battle. The *Mahābhārata* multiplies peoples in all directions of space, and at the same time the notion of ārya is diluted in an infinite gradation: the clearly non-ārya peoples leave between themselves and the āryas a host of peoples of uncertain status, which the lists classify sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. Thus we learn that, setting aside the inhabitants of the northern plain, who are distinctly valorized, there is scant respect for those who live in the mountains—hunters—or those who live near the sea or in marshy regions, and those who come from the south. In the hierarchy of peoples (tribes? kingdoms?—we do not know what social realities all these names refer to) there is a centre, an ill-defined periphery, and then the outer darkness. But perhaps the most important thing is that the epic recounts a war between ārya enemy-brothers who fight each other for sovereignty over the earth. Incarnated in one camp are demons, enemies of the gods, in the other, gods; and victory must go to the gods' camp in order for the socio-cosmic order to be upheld. But each camp contains a fine mixture of ārya and non-ārya and every possible intermediate status. The camp of the gods includes many kings from south India, and the camp of the demons has as its war-lords some very pure āryas (who are also gods), one of whom, on his death-bed, even instructs the king of the camp of the gods in the duties of the ārya king. In a fine speech, a demon incarnate who secretly supports the camp of the gods (which includes his sister's sons) explains that everywhere there are āryas and non-āryas and that there is no territory or kingdom which bears the stamp of pure Aryan-ness.

The picture painted by the *Mahābhārata* is, of course, in no way

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historical. It is not easy to locate most of the peoples mentioned, including those who seem to have entered recorded history. But there is perhaps a deeper truth, not least in this extreme political fragmentation, since each 'people' is provided with a 'king', with the infinite gradation of statuses which has always characterized the real India. Moreover, even when one is classified as inferior or superior, one may be led to collaborate, each in his own place, in the overall destiny of the earth; and this is true of either camp. This is an invitation to re-read the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Although the location of the kingdom here is distinctly shifted towards the east of the Ganges plain (a fact which some have seen as a sign that the Indo-European invasions had continued their eastward advance), one could nonetheless carry out a fairly similar analysis. Rāma, the pure king exiled from his kingdom by a step-mother, has to fight to win back his wife Sītā (i.e. the Earth over which he reigns) against a king of the cannibal demons called *rāksasas*, whose capital is in Lanka on the top of a mountain. The same criteria come into play, and Rāvaṇa, the king of the demons, is clearly placed at a level inferior to Rāma's, but modern Indian scholars are mistaken in seeing Rāvaṇa as representing low-status tribes, since he has Brahman status and is therefore ārya, but an ārya who must be defeated because he wants to destroy the socio-cosmic order. The same argument applies to the monkeys who provide the bulk of Rāma's armies against him: how can they be seen as aboriginal tribes (the very notion is a modern one) when the gods Sūrya, Indra, king of the gods, and Vāyu, are incarnate among them?

Thus the dichotomy which, in each epic, opposes one party to another, when it is a question of ensuring the triumph of 'good' over 'evil' (quotation marks are called for when the notions are so different from our own), is at the same time a total refusal of an Iranian or Manichean type of dualism. In each party, the pure and the impure coexist, and the aim of the struggle is to bring about the triumph of an order which is objectively definable in ethico-religious terms in which everyone has his place. It is here that one is sure of finding something of the Hindu mental universe: there is no notion of specifically ethnic oppositions, and in particular none that can be based on the dichotomy Aryan-Dravidian. The Drāviḍas figure in the epic as one people among others, associated with the south, but nothing distinguishes them apart from this original fault.

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Moreover, the Śūdras, who are not ārya, form the fourth 'class'—*varṇa*—of brahmanic society, which would not be complete, or even viable, without them. Has the question ever been asked as to what a society based on very exacting norms of ritual purity would be like if a part of itself were not devoted to the reputedly impure tasks, thus enabling the others to remain pure? No normative Indian text tries to base the inferiority of the Śūdras on any foreign origin, a defeat of ancient times recorded in legendary history. It is above all a matter of status, for all eternity. High-born children are Śūdra until they have received the complete sequence of sacramental rites. For women, it is marriage that enables them to cease to be regarded as Śūdra, whatever the rank of their family of origin. As for the lowest, most impure castes—those whom Europeans have named 'untouchables' (it is not an Indian term)—they are usually said to derive from forbidden unions between castes, particularly marriages in which the wife's status is higher than the husband's.

Beneath the surface dichotomy, the epic offers a vision of an extremely cohesive society, despite the apparent looseness of its political organization. One is all the more inclined to take seriously this classical image since one still finds it today when one observes what remains of traditional India. In each kingdom of the land of India, however small its surface, the king appears as the centre around which everything revolves. The king himself, moreover, is nothing more than the representative, the counterpart, the earthly incarnation of the god who rules his territory and whose temple is also the centre of the world. The fact that the palace and the temple constitute two faces of the same centre serves to remind us that the king, taken in isolation, is nothing. But his people would be incapable of structuring themselves other than around this dual centre, theoretically occupied by the Kṣatriya king and the Brahman priests. Social organization is governed by stable principles, and the separation of the pure and the impure is chiefly visible at the two extremes of the social ladder, leaving in the centre a vaguer region in which precedence is more contested. But the opposition high:low, pure:impure, which is essential to this hierarchical vision of society, has to be conceived above all as a close complementarity, even when it implies separations in space. To put it yet another way, in each territorial 'unit'—which can be as small as a village with its chief—one finds, theoretically at least, the

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totality of the Hindu socio-religious structure and its values. Each person knows the other and where he belongs: the patron and his clientele, the king and his subjects, the household priest and the families he serves, are bound together in a 'face-to-face' relationship which in our eyes would seem to rule out awareness of the extreme distance between the high and the low. Whatever the quarrels, and the more or less endemic factions, each person knows he is caught in a complex of vertical and horizontal relationships, more or less distant but nowhere really interrupted. As for the king, he is responsible for order in his kingdom, and through this for the whole socio-cosmic order, for solidarity does not end on earth but encompasses the three worlds of the gods, men and demons. This does not prevent him from organizing his defence either on his frontiers or through diplomacy. Ideally, and according to the very image that the *Mahābhārata* gives of him, the perfect king is he who must reign over the whole world by subordinating the other kings in a subtle pyramid in which economic and military power vies with status. It is also this image that is put forward by the great rituals of royal consecration and horse sacrifice. The totality, thus experienced and understood, is what has to be explained.

That is why we must eschew the historical overview; that is, any approach that would attempt to hypothetically reconstruct historical pedigrees—first on a Hindu, then on a Vedic level—as a means to re-establishing a linear continuity that is visibly lacking. Rather than concerning ourselves with their dating or origins, we prefer to recover these elements such as they were organized and hierarchized according to that value system which exists within the broader context of the atemporal vision that the Hindu has of his universe. If he mentions the Vedas—of which he generally knows nothing, and whose ultimate authority his particular group may well deny—it is not as a corpus of very ancient texts, but above all as a universal reference. Venerable age is, as it were, derived from the inviolability of the norm rather than the other way round. Therefore we will approach Vedic Revelation through the eyes of Hindus, taking care to avoid the misconception that all Hindus have the same monolithic view of it. But it is around the Revelation that we shall see taking shape a Hinduism which draws from it different readings and, within certain limits, readings that shift in the course of the centuries. The term 'Hinduism'—which is, of course, of

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Persian and not Indian origin—is a convenient label to designate this set of readings *and* their structural organization. Orthodox Brahmanism, which is closer to the Revelation, is not the ancestor of modern Hinduism; it is its permanent heart, the implicit model for or/and against which *bhakti*, tantrism and all their sects have been constituted. It has moreover persisted to the present day, changing as little as possible to respond to the needs of the hour, living in castes of Brahmans of whom it is the *raison d'être*. It is not so much the evolution of Hinduism over the centuries as the very recent impact of western values that has caused it to lose its implicit normative function. So, without denying change over the centuries, one is nonetheless sent back to the complex, stable system of values, beliefs and practices that still underlines the surface variations and which alone makes them comprehensible.

The calculated risk taken in this method of presentation entitles me to an additional audacity—which might also help to prove its validity. In the last few years I have become convinced that what now remains of traditional India, and is observed by ethnologists and social anthropologists, is greatly clarified by reference to what I shall call the classical tradition, and that it is absolutely essential to move beyond the epistemological duality which, up to now, has opposed 'armchair' Indologists to 'field-workers'. Conversely, when the most venerable and most abstract texts start to come to life in conversation with learned Brahmans capable of commenting on them, one realizes that they literally take on flesh and blood when juxtaposed with contemporary observation. And so I shall not hesitate to telescope the centuries and to move from a text to a concrete experience of India whenever the same principle of understanding seems to be involved. The very accumulation of such connections is what will make the validity of the procedure increasingly probable.

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CHAPTER 1

Man and the Absolute

When I was at school, one of my teachers once pointed out to us the breadth and depth that a line of French poetry took on as soon as it contained the word 'God' ('Dieu'). Whatever its etymological origins or its use in Greek and Latin for beings of lesser value, the name 'God' retains for us the absolute transcendence and holiness of the Biblical Yahweh. It can only be a proper noun, a name, because in our civilization it is unambiguously applied to the Absolute, who can only be unique. The attempts occasionally made to flaunt unbelief by writing 'God' without a capital letter—and without an article!—seem somewhat ridiculous. Even if believers have historically compromised themselves in many ways, the consequences fall on themselves and more especially on the Church which represents God on earth but is not God, and perhaps also on belief in the existence of God; but the name of the Absolute remains intact.

The situation is much less simple in India. One reason for this is that there have been not one but at least two terms to designate the Absolute, neither term being superior to the other. Secondly, and more importantly, these two terms, which originated within Indian culture, retain connotations and uses which inform us about the men who adopted them as names for the Absolute. We therefore have two reasons, rather than one, for taking the Absolute as our starting point when we consider Indian thought. As we know, this Absolute has, to a certain degree, captured the imagination of the West, and this with the approval of the Hindus; on the other hand, this Absolute is integrally connected, by the very terms used to describe it, to the society which upholds it. In particular, we shall see its relationship with the Brahmans, and therefore with a whole social structure, a relationship which is part of its very definition and cannot be ignored. To speak in such terms implies, of course, that for the moment, we shall set aside the very real concerns of the Hindu theologians who, as much as our own, have sought to

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express the ineffable and the non-relational in terms intelligible to man.

The Absolute and the Brahmans

The name of the Hindu Absolute that is best-known in the West is *Brahman*. *Brahman* (neuter substantive) is pure Being, pure Consciousness, the Unlimited, or, according to another triad, pure Being, pure Consciousness and Beatitude. This teaching is found in the earliest *Upaniṣad*s (*c.* seventh century BC?). Rather than gloss these characteristics of *Brahman*, which have nothing disconcerting or even really new about them for us at first sight (if only because all translation is betrayal, presuming on equivalences that cannot be made), let us immediately turn to the 'human' correlate of the Absolute, *ātman* (literally, 'self'), i.e. the immortal principle which, in man, is destined to be released from the body, from all embodiment, and at last attains perfect identity with *Brahman*. This ātman is altogether human inasmuch as it must first dwell in a human body in order for liberation to be possible. But if, instead of fusing with the *Brahman*, it condemns itself by its deeds to be reborn in the body of an animal, lower down the ladder of Being, the ātman is no way changed, so that in this sense it is not specifically human. When, after having again dwelt in a human body and performed the necessary deeds, it is granted liberation, this ātman will, like the *Brahman* it always was, be pure Being, pure Consciousness, Beatitude. What will have changed in the meantime is not its ātman 'nature' but the relationships it maintained with the lower world through its actions—*karman*. People often speak of Hindu pantheism, because of this identification of ātman and *Brahman* in liberation; but there could not be a more total misunderstanding. Countless texts, revealed or not, warn against this interpretation. The most beautiful formulation, because it is the most dense, is the following: '*Brahman* is all, but all is not *Brahman*' (Maṇḍana Miśra, *Brahmasiddhi*, seventh century?). A misreading of this passage serves to reveal, in itself, a certain manner by which units of meaning may be delineated with but little concern for their real context. If, for example, we contrast the liberation of the ātman (*mokṣa*) with its transmigration from rebirth to rebirth (*saṃsāra*), it is self-evident that all cannot be *Brahman*, and that

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'communion' with the universe, through some vaguely religious or aesthetic contemplation, is out of the question. The break which marks the passage to a liberated state ought to imply a radical change of perspective with regard to this world. So it is that only a consciousness that primordially differentiates itself from the world (from human society? from nature?) is capable of conceptualizing liberation in pantheistic terms, as a communion with the All. One who is liberated is indeed reunited with the All since *Brahman* is the All; but this All cannot be the object of a unanimist or aesthetic perception.

We have by no means fully explored all that the name *Brahman* can give us by way of knowledge of the Absolute. Its etymological meaning is of little consequence for our purposes. Nor is it of great relevance whether it has changed its meaning in the course of a historical evolution (which in any case we cannot reconstruct) or whether one meaning immediately called forth the complementary meaning. But the fact is that the same name has been applied over the centuries to two opposing and complementary orders of reality, as if there were two faces or two levels of the Absolute, a fact which is not without significance for the very conception of the Absolute and of what is not the Absolute (since 'all is not *Brahman*').

According to Indian tradition, the *Upaniṣads*, which speak of the *Brahman* as Absolute and which present themselves as the culmination of the Veda—*vedānta*—are the continuation of a group of texts: the *Saṃhitās*, or collections of hymns, and the *Brāhmaṇas*, ritual texts in prose, which describe the major Vedic sacrifices often in obscure terms and with heavy reliance on myth as an explanatory apparatus. These texts are undoubtedly very ancient but, to judge from their content, it would be very difficult, though perhaps not philologically impossible, to establish an indisputable order of succession among them. The most fertile approach, in any case, if one wants to understand what they represent for the Hindu consciousness, is to take them in the order in which they are traditionally given and recited for reasons which probably owe little to history. For, arranged in the order, *Saṃhitās-Brāhmaṇas-Upaniṣads* (together with a fourth group of texts which is inserted between the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* and to which we shall turn in a moment, the *Āraṇyakas*), they constitute the brahmanic Revelation, *Veda* in the widest sense (literally, 'knowledge') or *Śruti*

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(literally, 'hearing'), in other words the set of absolutely inviolable, irrefutable texts to which Brahmanism, and Hinduism in general, make reference. These texts, which are very difficult to understand for most Hindus and even for the majority of Brahmans now as in the past, were composed in very specialized Brahman circles, devoted both to sacerdotal practice and to theological reflexion around Vedic sacrifice. The data they provide, which are regarded as timeless (and even, in some schools of thought, as self-revealed), have been amplified and reworked by a mass of other texts of lesser authority, which constitute the tradition—*smṛti*. For the moment we shall only deal with what may help us to understand how the Revelation is organized: rules concerning the solemn brahmanic rites (those mentioned in the Śruti), domestic ritual, and the codes of socio-religious laws which complete the edifice of the ideal brahmanic society and its religion.

The revealed texts which deal with so-called 'brahmanic' ritual use the term *brahman* to designate several things. In the neuter, *brahman* can be the name of the ritual formula; in the masculine it is the name of one of the priests of the solemn Vedic sacrifice, who has a quite distinct place in the group of priests required by the sacrifice since he says nothing, handles nothing, does nothing, but bears within him perfect knowledge of the rite, sacrificial science, and silently oversees the co-ordinated unfolding of an extremely complex sequence of rites and recitations. Thus it is not surprising that *Brahman* (neuter) should also mean the totality of Vedic knowledge, a notion which may be understood in several ways: knowledge of the revealed texts, so that they can be recited by rote—this is one of the daily obligations of the orthodox Brahman, known significantly as *brahmayajña*, 'sacrifice to brahman'—or knowledge of the content of these texts, of the duties they impose and the rituals they describe. *Brahman* is ultimately synonymous with *Veda* in the Tradition, or with that which, in some circumstances, symbolizes the whole *Veda*, namely the syllable *Oṃ* which opens and closes every recitation of a Vedic text.

The term *brāhmaṇa*, which we have already encountered (in the neuter form) as the name of the revealed texts of ritual, is a derivative of *Brahman*. It also provides (in the masculine form) the Sanskrit name of the sacerdotal 'class', that of the 'Brahmans' (as they are known in English). The same revealed texts and their

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extensions in the Tradition indicate to us the place of these Brahmans in society: priests and scholars by right of birth (if not always in reality), they are at the top of the social hierarchy. In second place come the Kṣatriyas, who are both princes and warriors, followed by the Vaiśyas, farmers or merchants; finally, the Śūdras are defined as the servants of the other three 'classes', to whom they owe obedience; but they are not the lowest in the hierarchy since new groups have constantly been added to this structure from below to form what are known collectively as the 'untouchables'. Here, in our discussion of this grouping, we avoid using the term 'caste' because we are in fact talking about categories that differ from the real castes—called *jātis*—which are far more numerous and geographically much more diversified. The hierarchy of the jātis is nevertheless structured, for better or for worse, in accordance with the system of the four 'classes'—which are called *varṇas* (literally 'colours', since each class has its symbolic colour). The varṇas, which constitute ideally the totality of society, are each defined, simultaneously and indissolubly, by their function in society and their relation to Vedic ritual. The Śūdras are thus set completely apart since they are excluded from this ritual and in this respect they are opposed to all other varṇas. The Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas, on the other hand, are within orthodox society, inasmuch as they may have the Vedic rites performed on their behalf by Brahmans and may receive from them teaching of the Vedic texts which they must theoretically recite. Thus there is an opposition between the Brahmans and the two other varṇas of orthodox society, since only the Brahmans possess theoretical and practical Vedic knowledge, in other words, *Brahman*.

But it is quite clear that the most interesting opposition, the one on which brahmanic authors have endlessly speculated, is between the Brahmans and the Kṣatriyas. As early as the *Brāhmaṇas*, the Kṣatriya is the 'offerer of sacrifice' *par excellence*, the holder of a temporal power, however modest, who cannot hope to ensure the prosperity of his territory and the success of his arms without the services of the Brahman (the performer of sacrifice), who carries out the appropriate rites for him and advises him on important decisions. Conversely, the Brahman depends more or less completely on the prince for his maintenance—the priestly labourer is worthy of his hire—and his living conditions. He cannot fulfil all

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his duties as a Brahman unless he lives under the reign of a good prince who pays well for his services, and every good prince needs a good Brahman. Thus there is perfect reciprocity. The function of the Kṣatriya—*kṣatra*—includes in its definition the religious duties of the prince, his functions as an 'offerer of sacrifice', which do not entitle him to perform the rites himself, but oblige him to have recourse to the Brahman. So the term 'temporal power' is only a very approximate translation of this function. On the other hand, the Brahman's function, his 'power', so to speak, is *Brahman*. This is a new and final use of the term, which implies an extension of its meaning: the order which maintains the society thus structured and enables it to function is *dharma*. The Brahman is not only responsible for Vedic science, in the narrow, sacerdotal meaning of the term; through his teaching and his advice he is also responsible for the social order of dharma which he has worked out in the Tradition. That is why a king has not only a Brahman chaplain but also a Brahman minister. Only a Brahman is competent to know the religious (and other) norms of men's conduct, not least those of the prince: the texts of the Tradition are all the work of Brahmans, and the brahmanic ideal society is the idea of it that is imposed by the Brahmans.

But do they really impose it? Or is it again we who see things that way? They have neither weapons nor power of any sort, other than the power they derive from their science of values. And there is no more a 'Brahman nature' that might account for their privilege, than there is a humanity of ātman. According to the most orthodox view, one is a Brahman because one is born of Brahman parents, not by virtue of any particular intrinsic excellence. Perhaps this will serve to temper our righteous indignation: the social hierarchy is defined by an order entirely extrinsic to its members. The Brahman is not superior by nature, only by position. He may of course fall from his caste by acting contrary to his duties, but that will make him an 'outcaste', not a Kṣatriya or a Śūdra. Conversely, one cannot be born a Śūdra and aspire to wear the brahmanic 'sacred thread', although it is not unknown for a caste *as a whole* to rise in the hierarchy; but, in any case, an individual cannot but belong to his social group, otherwise his state is the most wretched there can be, reduced as he is to himself and his immediate family.

It is not very difficult to guess that the Brahmans are primarily

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responsible for the name of the Absolute which recalls the name of their specific domain: *Brahman*. Identity of name in such a highly structured social context raises the question of the shift from one register to the other. It is tempting to imagine that the Brahmans simply projected into the Absolute that which was seen by everyone, and *a fortiori* by themselves, as the supreme value of their society. And there is clearly an element of truth in this: the Absolute *Brahman* is 'impersonal', which, it should be noted, is a purely negative and entirely Western way of characterizing this grammatically neutral Absolute. In more positive terms, this means that the collective function of the Brahmans, their knowledge (which itself means 'Veda') of the *Veda*, was projected onto the Absolute. Whatever the case, this was a neutral principle, rather than some divine character that might have been clothed in brahmanic dignity.[1] This is a new opportunity to observe that it is not any particular Brahman who is important, but the function he inherits from his parents and which he cannot sidestep, lest he be nothing at all.

But we should distrust what seems self-evident to us: it is not so obvious what led the Brahmans to project their *Brahman* into the Absolute if we judge by what actually happened. At a moment that is difficult to situate historically and geographically, alongside the ritualistic and social religion based on the first part of the Revelation, there appeared an antithetical religious form, which all the evidence indicates was formed in the same high-caste circles in which Brahmans and Kṣatriyas competed in virtue and knowledge. Whereas the Brahman or the Kṣatriya who lives in his society—in his village or citadel—has existence and essence only through his social function, there are henceforward (and perhaps they appeared at the same time as the social structure was taking shape—Buddhism already presupposes them), men whom the social values do not satisfy and who seek more permanent and truly supreme values elsewhere. Elsewhere, in other words means, outside society as it has been constituted and the function performed within it. It means outside the bounds of village or town, in the forest which represents the terrifying and the unorganized; a permanent threat to social life; but with also unlimited possibilities of restoration. It also means solitude, as opposed to life in a group; non-action towards social duties; non-desire in relation to the multiple appetencies of social

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man; the resorption of man (who is only social) in pre- or post-human, infra- or supra-social undifferentiatedness. This undifferentiated Absolute would be given the name *Brahman*.

The search for the Absolute outside of the social group—which, at a distance, somewhat resembles the flight into the desert by the early Christian anchorites—is bound up with a whole philosophy which itself cannot be understood without reference to the conceptions of the society from which it breaks away. This society—of which we shall later see the very human complexity—has a sacral view of itself. Its goals are terrestrial, but its means of action, at whatever level, always have a religious or magico-religious aspect. There is always a rite—essentially a sacrifice, a vegetable or animal offering to a deity—for each goal that is aimed at, including the goal which preoccupies every man, the life hereafter. Each rite has its specific effect and—by a disquieting corollary which opens the way for reflection and questioning—the effect, like the rite, is necessarily limited. The ritualistic texts of the Vedic revelation give little information about the heaven which the rites will ensure after death, or about the length of the sojourn in heaven. They mysteriously threaten with 're-death' those who fail to perform the rites satisfactorily. The ascetics who renounce the world push such a conception to its ultimate implications: man, always driven by some desire, acts in order to realize it. Action—karman—and especially ritual action—also karman—always leads to a result, and it is the link between action and its 'fruit' which makes the stuff of an individual life. This is true of all actions, including those intended to ensure access to heaven after death (backed up by the ancestor worship subsequently offered by the living descendants) and those which seem to produce no result in this life. Thus action, and especially ritual action, condemns man (and the other living beings) to endless rebirth and redeath. The only way to escape from this perpetual flux—*saṃsāra*—is to remove oneself from the mechanism of karman, and therefore from human society, by an explicit renunciation of all that one has been up to that time. It is by this renunciation, this radical break with what constitutes him as a man, that the religious ascetic secures liberation—*mokṣa*. The non-being who is individual man in society merely divests his birth and death of all significance, to the extent of condemning them to endless repetition. At the moment when a man separates himself from his

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group—an individual act if ever there was—he does so not in order to recognize his individuality but in order to abolish it, to free his ātman of any individualized feature and merge it with *Brahman*.

It is immediately clear that it is far too simplistic to see renunciation of the world—*sannyāsa*—the Hindu form of the pursuit of the Absolute, as responsible for the supposed inability of Indians to adapt to modern economic imperatives. Let us leave to others the satisfaction of contrasting Hindu spiritualism with Western materialism, since it would be equally valid to reverse the elements of the problem: the specifically Hindu form of break with the world and the conceptions on which it is based are governed by the specifically Hindu way of being in the world. Logically, therefore, one would rather have to seek the source of the resistance to modernity in the ideology underlying the social organization, which is merely to pose the question in a different form without in any way simplifying it. But the links which, by virtue of their very opposition, exist between the two registers of *Brahman* do mean that each helps to cast light on the other.

But we must complicate the picture still further by introducing a second name of the Absolute, similarly fraught with social resonances. Among the accounts of the origin of the world provided by the Vedic texts, undoubtedly the one which was to have the greatest destiny was the 'Hymn to the Puruṣa' (*Ṛgveda*, X.90). In it we learn that the whole organized world, at the centre of which is brahmanic society, was born of the sacrifice of a cosmic Puruṣa. The term *puruṣa* was very soon to designate empirical man, but in the collection of hymns which contains the 'Hymn to the Puruṣa', man is designated in other ways and the term *puruṣa* only appears in the context of this cosmogony. It rather means 'the Male', but at the same time the description of the parts of his body, which is divided up in the sacrifice to give rise to animate beings, starting with the four human varṇas, shows that this Male has human form. So it is from someone who is a man and yet not a man that the cosmos is born, through an act of sacrifice. From him each man will soon derive his generic name, but because of his origin he will retain both a certain 'personality' and a transcendence with respect to all men, even Brahmans. When he becomes the Absolute itself, Puruṣa, or Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa, or Nārāyaṇa, he will keep these two features. In particular, we learn that he manifests himself in the cosmos through

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a quarter of himself, while the other three quarters are in the beyond, but the four varṇas are born of him.

Two paths to salvation

However reluctant one may be to reconstruct *a posteriori* a history, the stages of which remain largely unknown to us, the risk must nonetheless be taken. Otherwise there is a danger of concealing the initial complexity and the difficulty of understanding what happened between the oldest texts—the Revelation—and those provided by the 'finished' or, so to speak 'classical' state of Hinduism, from the first centuries AD. While almost nothing is known of the society which saw the birth of the Vedic hymns, the fact remains that the very ancient cosmogony of the 'Hymn to the Puruṣa' already contains the hierarchy of the four varṇas and their names, and that the creative act is a sacrifice, i.e. one of the rites of which the Brahmans are the priests. Thus it is much the same society which gave the Puruṣa sacrifice its central role and which also set *Brahman* in the place it occupies. So it is not surprising that '*Puruṣa*' and '*Brahman*' appear in the Upanisads as two names of the Absolute sought by the 'renouncers'. Moreover—and this seems to be a universal law—the Upaniṣadic literature is probably not the work of the 'renouncers' themselves and does not present their religious experience to us directly. Rather, it shows us, as if in its nascent state, the thinking of men who are in the process of breaking away from the world but who remain very much involved with ritualistic brahmanic society, with its numerous gods receiving sacrificial offerings. So, at first sight, there is scarcely any difference between those who give the name '*Brahman*' to the goal of their search and those who prefer the name '*Puruṣa*'. The notion of liberation is expressed in similar images: salt dissolving in water to give a single indistinct mass of salt water, rivers that lose their identity as they flow into the sea, the nectar of different flowers from which bees make a single honey, clay or iron which is the substance and the only reality of receptacles with different shapes and names. . . . It would be quite difficult to draw a distinction between these images, and therefore between concepts people have regarding liberation, in relationship to the name of the Absolute.

If, however, this apparently unstructured mass is considered from

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the standpoint of the subsequent developments, then it becomes possible to distinguish broadly two routes to liberation, two types of orientation towards the Absolute, which correspond fairly well to the duality of the names of the divine. These two spiritual itineraries were perhaps not clearly distinguished for people contemporary with these texts, but they probably diverged rapidly as their potentialities were explored. The path which leads to knowledge of the identity of *Brahman* and the ātman has its charter, as it were, in Chapter VI of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*: there one finds the teaching of monism, almost all the images just mentioned used to describe the resorption of the empirical individual into the undifferentiatedness of the All, and the famous formula *tat tvam asi*—'that thou art'—with which, after each comparison, the father teaches his son his identity with the All. The son had, however, completed his Vedic training with his master and was returning home to his father, proud of his knowledge and ready to enter the state of 'householder'. It is then that his father completes his education by imparting to him knowledge of ātman-*Brahman*. The *Upaniṣad* is clearly seen here as the 'completion of the *Veda*'—*vedānta*—and this text was to remain fundamental for what subsequently became the philosophical system of Vedānta. It defines what became known as 'the path of knowledge', in which the seeker of liberation must realize within himself his identity with the Absolute, on the basis of the teaching given to him by his master. True, he is not dispensed from personal meditation, an inward effort to perceive within himself what he is taught about himself; but none of that would be conceivable without the aid of the guru who brings him from outside the authorized testimony of the Revelation. Ultimate experience is, indeed, by definition inexpressible, since it is beyond all duality, and the authority of the Revelation embodied in the guru is needed in order to seek it without risk of error or discouragement.

In fact, this 'path of knowledge' happens to be the most orthodox, and it is no accident that the Absolute is there called *Brahman*: the role of the guru is essential for transmitting the Revelation, and it does no more than continue the teaching of the first part of the Revelation which every member of the three higher varṇas or 'twice-born' must receive, because of the initiation which makes him capable of receiving the revealed teaching. The subse-

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quent Vedānta does not deny this interpretation. Śaṅkara only speaks to the 'twice-born' and, if he teaches that one must reject rites and adopt the life of the *sannyāsin*—'renouncer'—in order to attain liberation, his very conception of sannyāsa is only meaningful within the context of the higher varṇas, who have a share in Vedic Revelation and brahmanic practice. Sannyāsa presents itself as the fulfilment of the life of a 'twice-born'—and more particularly a Brahman, as will subsequently become clearer—just as the *Upaniṣad* is the completion of Veda. This is, moreover, explicitly systematized, to the effect that every Brahman must pass successively through four 'stages of life': that of the brahmanic student, between initiation and the end of his Vedic studies, during which time he must observe absolute chastity; that of the married householder, when he sacrifices, and begets sons, which is the social phase *par excellence*; that of the forest dweller, an intermediate and largely theoretical stage which will be examined shortly; and finally that of the thorough-going 'renouncer', sannyāsin, the stage which ensures his liberation.

The path which leads to Puruṣa, 'the supreme abode', is first and foremost that which is described in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. There it is already given the name *yoga*, and the stages it distinguishes in the mystic ascent towards Puruṣa were to have an extraordinary destiny. These stages, which have to be understood as the yogin's progressive withdrawal from his empirical individuality until his resorption into Puruṣa, were reversed and used by the great mythic texts of classical Hinduism, then by the Sāṅkhya system, as phases in the emission of the cosmos from Puruṣa, which had itself become the Great Yogin. From there, they extended to practically the whole of sectarian Hinduism. In opposition to the Vedāntic path, the yoga method is characterized by a less essential relationship to the Revelation (of which it is nonetheless a part). In classical Yoga, as in every school of yoga, the guru remains necessary, but his role is not so much to repeat the revealed teaching as to guide the apprentice yogin's personal effort. Thus the methods and schools of yoga have been almost infinitely diversified as they have moved more or less far from the Vedic Revelation. It will therefore not be surprising to find all possible social origins and all degrees of ritual purity among the yogins, right up to extreme impurity.

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In another vein, in Puruṣa, in accordance with the semi-anthropomorphic concept Hindus have of him, is given another name, a name which moreover points to later developments in classical Hinduism. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, he is Viṣṇu; in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, he is Śiva. These are two Vedic deities who were to be promoted to the rank of supreme deities, both in 'general' Hinduism and sectarian Hinduism, one or the other being superior in different cases. This simultaneous elevation of two members of the Vedic pantheon is by no means arbitrary, and their respective roles in the sacrifice introduce new distinctions into the yogic path and its relationship with brahmanic orthodoxy. But the fact that the divine is no longer a neutral principle also changes its relationship to the still empirical man who aspires to liberation. Nor is it an accident that the *Kaṭha* and the *Śvetāśvatara*[2] bring into this relationship an element of election, grace, which later acquired more or less importance in the different schools and sects. The disciple's knowledge and his assiduity in his exercises do not suffice to ensure the success of his undertaking if the Puruṣa himself does not call him. It is not hard to guess what sort of divisions such a notion encourages: the philosophical system of classical Yoga—which, like the five other *darśana* (literally, 'views, ways of seeing'), concerns only the 'twice-born'—plays down the role of the supreme God whom it nonetheless calls Īśvara, 'the Lord', and thereby reduces the importance of election. Yoga then tends to be a technique whose very perfection ensures success. By contrast, it will be seen that the more universalist current of *bhakti* emphasizes Devotion to God and the grace that the devoted may expect from it. These divergences exist even within orthodox society, but are obviously much greater when one moves from a rigorously orthodox religious movement to a sect which claims to abolish the differences between the castes.

In a kind of reaction to this, the brahmanic system *par excellence* of Mīmāṃsā—which developed its philosophical theories in order to provide a basis for the hermeneutics of the Vedic texts—paid less and less attention to the Vedic gods. Yet practically and theoretically they are essential to the ritual, as beneficiaries of the sacrificial offerings. In the revealed texts, and even in the classical myths, one has the feeling that the gods respond to men's worship with the duly codified favours that men expect. There is a reciprocity of services

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between gods and men which can even be said to define dharma, the socio-cosmic order for which the Brahmans are primarily responsible. The gods feed on the smoke of the sacrificial offerings poured into the fire, the mouth of the gods; in exchange, they send rain at the right time, and so on. So it seems somewhat paradoxical that the philosophers of Mīmāṃsā, rigorous guardians of brahmanic orthodoxy, eventually so diminish the role of the gods that they no longer see them as anything more than names, and put all the emphasis on sacrifice alone. Sacrifice is the technique which ensures earthly and heavenly happiness, just as yoga ensures liberation. This evolution of Mīmāṃsā would be unintelligible if one failed to locate it in the context of an increasingly pervasive religion of devotion, in which sacrifice itself has to change its meaning in order to survive.

It can already be seen that the second path towards liberation opened up by yoga is much richer in future developments, much less rigid in its framework and theoretical content than the Vedantic path. At the same time, we may observe that the intensity of speculations on liberation, and the very radicalism they brought to the fore in their break with the world, have not been without impact on this world. It is out of this very tension, a tension that obtains between these two polarities in values, that Hinduism, in its timeless form, took shape. In this way we come to the fundamental opposition that exists, without contradictions, between the religion of the *Brāhmaṇas* and that of the *Upaniṣads*.

It has already been observed that it is difficult to understand in terms of a rigorous order of succession the two aspects of the brahmanic Revelation—organization of the world and renunciation of the world—which seem rather to be given at the same time for the same society. While the ritualistic speculations of the *Brāhmaṇas* are indeed pitched at the level of this earthly world, it cannot be said that they ignore those of the *Upaniṣads*. It is always possible to imagine that the passages of the *Brāhmanas* which reveal the influence of the *Upaniṣads* are later additions intended to integrate new preoccupations. But such a historical reconstruction of the Revelation would not account for a group of intermediate revealed texts, which have already been alluded to: the *Āraṇyakas*. Traditional Vedic recitation does indeed place them between the *Brāhmanas* and the *Upaniṣads*, and some of the *Upaniṣads* would even appear to be parts of *Āraṇyakas*. In these 'Forest Books'—that

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is the meaning of the word—the tension between the secular pole and the renunciation pole operates at full strength, and it is impossible to see them as a phase of *historical* transition between these two extremes. On the contrary, it has to be acknowledged that the totality of the secular brahmanic Revelation is there confronted with a Revelation of liberation equally complete in its essentials, and that the structural opposition between the two gives rise to new speculations and new practices in which these two irreconcilable principles have to coexist.

The hermit Brahman

From a certain moment onwards, a moment located a few centuries before the common era, an adult Brahman's self-understanding came to take on a twofold meaning. To be a Brahman meant to be a Vedic sacrifical priest, a minister of the revealed Word, a master of the house entirely occupied in a network of obligatory ritual observances in which all was interpreted in terms of sacrifice. It would have been impossible for such an individual to follow any occupation outside of this context; in any case the Brahman knew that it was his careful accomplishment of ritual duties which ensured the prosperity of both his family and society at large. But *at the same time* he also knew of a higher sort of religion, something that lay beyond the sacrificial rites, beyond his life as head of the household, a religion which held the promise of eternal happiness. And perhaps, as a consequence, he came to realize a diminution in the value and urgency of his day-to-day activities, duties that were so tiresome and hair-splitting in their attention to detail. And with this, he would have realized the higher value of attending to his ātman, as opposed to attending to the regularity of the sun's motions or the succession of the seasons. In this situation, still within the brahmanic universe in the narrowest sense of the word, there takes shape a religious form which is made up entirely of compromises, and which may well be the starting point for all the subsequent developments: sacrifice is not abandoned, but instead of offering it to the gods, in real fire, it is offered to one's ātman, in the fire of the breath. All the outward observances are thus, partially at least, internalized and diverted from their initial application. It is obviously of enormous significance that these rites have to be

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performed no longer in the village, but in the forest, just far enough away for no human dwellings to be visible.

The *Āraṇyakas* are the revealed texts of brahmanism which, at present, seem to us by far the most obscure. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps the most fundamental is the fact that, as a corpus, they remain theoretical and describe, after a fashion, a no less theoretical 'stage of life' of the Brahman: that of the 'forest dweller', which would have been intermediate between the master of the house and the thorough-going renouncer. But, setting aside their impact on later Hinduism, their immediate significance is indeed as testimonies to the work of reflection that lead the household-master Brahman increasingly to resemble the renouncer. The 'mental' sacrifice—or 'oblation with the breath'—as internalized sacrifice is called, is indeed not practised by a 'forest dweller', but by a master of the house. The Brahman living in the secular world adopts practices which are only conceivable in the renouncer, and which are in fact part of the earliest observances of every renouncer.

I shall dwell here on only one of them, which was later to turn into something which the early Brahmans had certainly not foreseen: *ahiṃsā* (literally, 'absence of desire to kill'), from which we have coined 'non-violence', is strictly only conceivable from the standpoint of the renouncer. It is the direct opposite of the animal slaughter included in the major Vedic sacrifices: to kill, to cause death, or simply to come into contact with a corpse is universally felt by man to be a source of impurity. Slaughter in the Vedic sacrifice and the manipulations concerning the victim do not escape this rule, as is shown by all the precautions taken to contain the impurity of death within strict limits and to leave intact the purity of the sacrificial offerings. Despite this codification of slaughter by the *Brāhmaṇas* the tradition sought to go further and to eliminate theoretically the impurity of sacrifice by declaring that 'to sacrifice is not to kill'. At all events, it would seem that the eating of meat was closely linked to sacrificial practice. In brahmanic society, there was probably no licit animal slaughter beyond the needs of sacrifice (but any meal might be interpreted in certain conditions as a sacrifice). Now, the sacrificial rite is precisely the act—karman—which the renouncer must abandon if he is to escape from rebirth. In ceasing to sacrifice, he loses any licit occasion to kill, which

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means that he is obliged to adopt a vegetarian diet. Among all the defilements that he must avoid, that of death remains essential. Domestic life entails many chances of 'murder', which he will avoid as far as possible: insects burnt by the fire, crushed by the broom or mortar, drowned in water. . . . So he will cook nothing himself, prepare himself no food, filter his water. . . . Perhaps on no other point is there a more fundamental opposition between the obligations of the householder and those of the renouncer. And yet, *within* brahmanic society, the Brahman was very soon to become the main champion of the value of *ahiṃsā*, which the renouncer cannot observe rigorously without *leaving* the society based on Vedic ritual. This was apparently one of the principal reasons for the abandonment of the major Vedic sacrifices; it was certainly the decisive factor in the Brahmans' adoption of a vegetarian diet, which is still the rule today.

The Tradition was also to feel the need to give to the master of the house—who cannot abandon his ritual obligations towards the gods, the ancestors, men and all beings, without putting the world in danger—the means of expiating the defilements induced by domestic life. It is only logical that it should then precisely relate these defilements to the 'major sacrifices' which every Brahman has to perform every day for the gods, the ancestors, men, all beings and *Brahman* (i.e. the Veda). Apart from the sacrifice to *Brahman*, the first four major sacrifices centre on the household fire—which is also the sacrificial fire—and the preparation of meals, which are to be offered to all of these daily invited guests before being consumed by oneself. The very fact that insects are killed in the performance of domestic life becomes quasi licit, since this is nothing other than a set of sacrificial rites. The damage is, of course, reduced to the minimum, if not for the sake of the insects, at least for the poor master of the house, who would otherwise have to sully himself, and therefore accumulate bad karman, in the performance of his duties. We shall see that the sacrifice itself, too essential to be abandoned, emerges completely transformed from this process. We are a long way from our notion of non-violence.

Hindu man

Is there in this context a notion of man implicitly or explicitly put

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forward? At first sight, one is tempted to say that there cannot be a notion of man, but there are only men of this or that category, this or that varṇa. There are indeed some important distinctions to be made subsequently. However, the existence of a supra-social religion, an Absolute which has to be sought outside society, makes it impossible to accept such a simple answer. Man is not reduced to his social existence, even if the latter adheres to his very essence, and in any case social existence, based on a hierarchical and functional view, also implies *a* notion of man. It is all too clear, on the other hand, that the man who lives in society and the man who aspires to liberation are essentially one and the same and that we cannot define the one without attending to the other; in a similar vein, we have seen the Absolute appear as belonging to a particular society, even as it denied that society.

At a first level, then, it is man involved in society whom one has to try to grasp in order to discover what makes him man. This immediately reduces the scope of the investigation: from the standpoint of the Revelation, only the first three varṇas count, those which take part in the Vedic rites: the Brahmans, the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas. But it is not sufficient for them to be born in order to be integrated into society. The name 'twice-born' which is given to them bears its full meaning: it is the initiation ceremony which introduces them into society, at about the age of eight. Up to that point, the rites which concern them are performed by their fathers who, in so doing, perform their own paternal duty. They themselves have no obligations; education is practically—and theoretically—absent.

Here we must leave theory behind us, with all its potential for misinterpretation, and cast a glance at contemporary Hindu society in order that we may judge what once were—and, it would appear, always have been—its practical considerations. Far from the child having a world apart, he is closely integrated into family life, especially that of the women, without having any of its responsibilities. He has no personal timetable, either for meals or for sleep, no rules of hygiene or cleanliness imposed from outside and supported by sanctions. He seems to live by pure whim, in total freedom, blissfully unaware of his surroundings. In reality, things are quite different: the child lives in perfect symbiosis with the world of the family (which moreover includes numerous children), and with the

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adults for whom he is often a toy passed from hand to hand. He adopts its habits, he is a *passive* participant in everything done in the household, and thus prepares to become later a master of the house fully aware of his responsibilities. Nowadays, the spread of schooling is disturbing this closed atmosphere, introducing into the child's mind the possibility of distance from family life. But for the moment, tradition still predominates and imposes its tacit rules on the school rather than the other way round. Anyone who has observed Indian primary school classes will have been struck by the collective, passive nature of the methods used to teach the basics of the 'three R's'; more weight is placed on the mechanisms of memory than on the quality of attention and understanding. How could the school introduce new norms, a different vision of the child's 'personality', and could it be *a priori* a factor of individualization? Such questions are discussed, and experts in American methods are attempting to transplant them onto the Indian soil. Will they succeed? For the moment, schooling is just one more element in Hindu society, and it duplicates the work of a traditional institution which we are now perhaps better placed to understand.

Thus the first effect of initiation is to make the child a social being. What does this mean? During the first stage, he will live with his guru (but in the case of a young Brahman, the guru may be his own father) who will teach him the revealed texts and render him capable of performing his tasks as a householder. Only then may he marry, maintain a household fire which will transform his life into a succession of rites, and perform the duties specific to his varṇa. But this is only the consequence of what initiation has made of him; to say that he has become a social being is too weak—or too strong—if by that one means entry into membership of a given social group. Surreptitiously, we would see there the recognition of his existence—at last!—as an individual within his group. In practice, this would not be completely wrong, but theoretically that would not account for the obligations incumbent on him. The young initiate is no more than a bundle of 'debts' which he will spend his life redeeming: a debt towards the gods, which he will pay off with the appropriate sacrifices; a debt towards his ancestors, which will require him to beget at least one son in order to perpetuate the cult of his ancestors; a debt towards the *ṛṣis*—the primordial 'seers' of the Revelation—which makes it his duty to learn the revealed texts

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(including the *Upaniṣads*) by heart and recite them for the rest of his life. So he enters into social existence only to become a link in the solid chain which binds the whole, and not solely as a member of his group. Nor is the 'whole' here limited to the totality of ritually defined human society, since it embraces the gods as well as the dead and the living in the order which structures the daily course of the world. Would the sun still rise each day if the Brahmans did not get up early in the morning and prepare its coming with the appropriate rites?

However, the full importance of ritual activity—karman—in the definition of what man is can only be measured by seeking to distinguish man from what is not man: animals and the gods. From one end to the other of Hindu religious literature, the answer is the same: it is the capacity to perform rites—and its corollary, the capacity for liberation from rites—that distinguishes man both from the animals and from the Vedic gods. Animals, not being enabled by birth to know the Revelation, also cannot perform the rites it prescribes. The *Purāṇas* tell us that animals are full of *tamas*—darkness and inertia; Mīmāṃsā observes that they are unable to set themselves a distant goal—as one must in order to perform rites whose immediate result is invisible. All philosophers agree, however, in crediting them by inference with the same capacities of perception and reasoning as man. So it is essentially the inability to perform rites or to transcend rites that makes the animal an inferior being, condemned to expiate in this way previous faults (committed in an earlier human life). Above men—since they are the inhabitants of heaven—the gods too cannot either perform rites or desire liberation. The *Purāṇas* explain this by the fact that the gods are happy and have nothing to desire that might incline them to do anything at all. Mīmāṃsā more prosaically considers that they cannot sacrifice because they have no gods other than themselves to sacrifice to.

This importance of the rite in defining humanity is taken further in the distinction which the human group makes between inhabited space and wild nature, essentially the forest. Not that the human world is opposed to nature as such: on the contrary, it is enfolded in nature like a child in its mother's arms, and the rite, as has been said, orders the physical world as well as human society. Human space, however, includes not only men but also domestic animals. The

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latter, which may be sacrificial victims, obviously have higher status than the wild animals pursued by the impure hunter. Among all the animals which populate human space, the cow occupies a privileged position, which is also explained by its relation to sacrifice and to the Brahman: the products of cows' milk form an important part of non-animal sacrificial offerings. Myths always symbolize the Brahman's sacerdotal function by means of a cow, and the latter eventually symbolizes the Brahman himself, since a Brahman without a cow is less than a complete Brahman. To kill a cow is almost as abominable as to kill a Brahman, although the revealed texts are categorical: certain rites included a cow as sacrificial victim. But 'to sacrifice is not to kill'.

If the rite thus serves to hierarchize beings, it is not difficult to see how it is also the basis of the hierarchical vision of man: social function is first and foremost defined, in orthodox theory, by a specific relation to the rite. The Brahman is the priest; the Kṣatriya is the 'sacrificing agent' and at the same time the possessor of the strength which protects the Brahmans and all other men; the Vaiśya, in addition to his role as a 'sacrificing agent', is the producer of the wealth required for the maintenance of the ritual activity without which there is no prosperity on earth. From this standpoint, various questions arise about the others: firstly, about women. Their case is relatively simple: they clearly do not have access to knowledge of the Revelation, and have no autonomous ritual activity; but they are necessarily associated with the rites performed by their husbands. Having no personal destiny after death (they are reunited with their husbands), they are likewise incapable of achieving liberation. To be reborn as a woman, even in a brahmanic family, is therefore another form of expiation.

As for the Śūdras, the least that can be said is that the Revelation is barely concerned with them. We shall see subsequently that they make up for this with bhakti. But it would be wrong to say that they are denied all humanity. They too have a karman inasmuch as they must serve the three higher varṇas, as the Tradition explicitly teaches. Their relationship to the rite is indirect but not entirely absent. The fact remains that rebirth as a Śūdra is one of the threats invoked against a man of high caste who fails to perform all his duties. It is no doubt a state sufficiently passive, with respect to karman, to place a man on the boundary of what is human, where

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there is nothing to hope for but a better rebirth. What status can be attributed to those who are even lower in the social hierarchy? There is no karman conceivable for them; they have to live away from the high castes in a space which may be either human or wild, at a level in the scale of beings which probably sets them below domestic animals. Thus one of the consequences of the ritual origin of the hierarchy of beings is that there is no clear-cut division between humanity and animality.

If the ordinary man is defined by his place in the whole as structured by rites, the logical consequence is that his own particular way of performing his obligations is the source of a certain individualization. It is possible that the this-wordly man might never have given explicit voice to this consequence if the renouncer—or, in the earliest context, the 'discussant', the Indian version of the Socratic philosopher, had not first brought it to light the better to refute it. In the world, karman is the rite which produces a determinate result, that which has to be done within the strict limits inside which it is prescribed in order to co-operate in the maintenance of dharma, the total order. The man who performs it is only aware of keeping his place in the socio-cosmic system, and he implicitly accepts limits assigned to him: life-span, membership of a certain social group, a certain lineage, etc. His social and family bonds are so strong that his troubles and joys are to a large extent those of the group to which he belongs. He cannot think of his own prosperity without thinking of that of his whole lineage (who would dare speak of nepotism in such a context?), he cannot ensure heaven after death without having done what had to be done, throughout his life, for the celestial happiness of his ancestors. Reference to himself as *ego* is scarcely made explicit outside the vicissitudes of his physical life: illness, physical suffering, or bodily enjoyment.

It was necessary to stand back in order to see things differently. And that is the paradox of brahmanic theory, a paradox *for us*, revealing in fact an anthropology different from our own: the renouncer, who refuses to keep any longer his place in the social fabric and so abandons all the rites, isolates himself from the whole and seems thus to attain a more individualized existence. His very language invites us to understand things in this way, since it condemns the accumulation of karman, sees it as the source of

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perpetual rebirths within a whole whose structure appears stable but whose beings pass endlessly through the processes of birth and death, synonyms of finitude and instability, of pain, in a word. The renouncer, by contrast, shaking off the whole weight of karman, seeks to recover the purity of his ātman, i.e. of the self which he essentially is. For him, the course of the world is of little account: the only thing which matters is the ātman, the only truly eternal being, which has to be detached from birth and death. The procedure is, without any doubt, that of an individual who has become aware of himself, who sees himself as something other than a flux of rites and events linked to rites, and who perceives the underlying 'personal' unity. The way in which he actualizes this awareness further accentuates its individual character: he will live as a solitary ascetic, chiefly concerned to keep himself free of any bond with any being, whether aversion or love, envy or contempt. All that counts is the final salvation of his ātman, liberation, mokṣa. One is bound to relate this option to the one which characterizes the great religions of the world, *mutatis mutandis*: entry into religious life, either solitary or monastic. It defines a level at which religion is no longer satisfied with social values and can find the deep meaning of human life only by severing the bonds with society. But in a context like brahmanism, in which social values leave so little room for individual expression, the break with the social institution can only appear even more sharply as entry into an individual religion.

Yet, in the renouncer's consciousness, at least in theory, it is the opposite that occurs. In abandoning the world, the sannyāsin abandons everything that made him an 'ego'—*ahaṃkāra*—so as to reabsorb his Self in the Absolute, where he finds no further trace of individuality. This fundamental notion, complementary to that of ātman-*Brahman* and karman, appears even in the earliest Vedantic *Upaniṣads*, in a transparent mythic form. The absolute *Brahman* 'creates' the world by becoming aware of himself as an ego: 'In the beginning, *Brahman* alone was here. It knew itself—ātman—only as 'I—*aham*—am *Brahman*'. From this, it became everything' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, I.4.10). A few lines further in the same text (I.4.17) we find: 'In the beginning the ātman alone was here. He was alone. He desired: "Would that I had a wife, that I might engender (a son); would that I had wealth, that I might perform the rites."

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These are all the objects of desire—*kāma*'. The empirical world only comes into existence and is only maintained by virtue of its being intertwined with the 'I'—*aham*—and the 'mine'—*mama*. And the function which makes man say 'I' and 'mine' is ahaṃkāra. That is the function of desire, which not only links man to this world, but constitutes the essential part of empirical man and 'individuates' him in the eyes of the renouncer by impelling him to perform rites. Conversely, the ātman which aspires to liberation is no doubt conceived as a plenitude of being (in contrast to Buddhism, which sees it as a void), but this pure being is so divested of all determination that nothing more resembles a void. This pure consciousness, in which no subject is opposed to any object, is closer to the Hegelian in-itself than the for-itself. There is nothing individual about it, not even anything human, except the incomprehensible aspiration towards liberation that brought it where it is and even left it as it approached its end. So for some this liberated state is beatitude, whereas for others it is merely absence of pain.

So if we try to formulate the brahmanic conception of man in terms closer to our usual language, we first have to observe that humanity is detached from that which it is not, since humanity alone takes part in the rites and can renounce the rites, but that these boundaries do not run exactly where we would set them (nor do those of Aristotle, incidentally); and furthermore that the content of the notion has nothing in common with what our own notion of humanity would lead us to expect. There is nothing 'inside' man which might make him truly a thinking, willing subject. In the world, he is a desiring agent for the sannyāsin, a bundle of social responsibilities for himself. Outside the world, he is merely a transparent mirror in which nothing is reflected. For the man encumbered with desires, the renouncer is a 'free' man, who has cast off his bonds but who pays sufficiently dearly for that freedom to consider it superior and inimitable; for the ascetic, the man living in his caste thinks only of satisfying his desires and prepares only pain for himself. What the theory never explains, is the transition from one state to another: how can one conceive the act whereby one renounces acts? Moreover, the tension between the two poles never leads to a dramatic or divided picture of man. If people occasionally ask themselves why the world exists, they very quickly sidestep the question by replying that it has no beginning, and

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therefore no cause or *raison d'être*. The divine 'game'—*līlā*—was soon to give a definitive theological form to the idea that human life has no meaning and needs none. Those who nonetheless find it good, cling to transmigration; and they are legion. Nothing prevents the others from seeking liberation.

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CHAPTER 2

The Four Goals of Man

One still remains within the brahmanic orthodoxy defined by its two poles when examining the theoretical system of values. At first sight, nothing could be more simple, since there is a single hierarchy of four terms which everyone knows by heart and must respect: liberation—mokṣa—at the very top, then dharma, the socio-cosmic order which organizes the empirical world, followed by *artha*, which includes all material interests—wealth, successful ventures and the means of ensuring them—and finally *kāma*, essentially amorous desire and pleasure. But we already know that the four of them cannot be arranged in a series, since mokṣa concerns the man who is leaving society whereas the other three are the goals pursued by man living in the world. And perhaps it is not so simple as it seems to pursue concurrently—while maintaining the hierarchy—goals as divergent as amorous pleasure, material interest, etc. But how can one designate dharma in a term which suggests to us ideas as self-evident as the first two? In fact, I would like to employ a term which could also refer to the individual, even if its semantic field also covered a higher level of individual consciousness. But one must reject all of the French or English equivalents of the term dharma that modern translations have offered in their attempts to bridge the gap between Indian realities and the western mind. It is neither morality, nor Good, nor law, nor justice. It is the socio-cosmic order, which can be said to be desirable simply inasmuch as it is necessary to the maintenance of the happy existence of the whole constituted by the 'three worlds'—*trailokya* (earth, heaven and the space between, or later, earth, heaven and the infernal regions). It is taught to men in the Revelation as mediated by the Brahmans, in principle without any reference to a transcendent Good. It is itself Good in that it ensures the continuity of the empirical world. If an individual fails to observe it, he must expect the worst disasters. If society as a whole neglects the prescriptions of dharma, then the world will perish; but the same will happen if a

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varṇa does not perform its proper functions or tries to take over those of other varṇas. In whatever way disorder enters the trailokya, the life of all is endangered. The absolute imperative does not pass here through a divine will or through individual consciousness; it is imposed from outside and as a totality, without any possible evasion. The constraint could not be greater.

The levels of dharma

We can immediately see that the notion of dharma resonates at different levels: to the extent that liberation is integrated into that model of human life which charts the 'four stages of life' (see p. 33), it too partakes, after a fashion, of the total cosmic order. If nothing else, it is mokṣa that maintains the universe in its proper orientation—even as it reminds man of his ultimate vocation to be reabsorbed into the undifferentiated All, at which point the cosmic order no longer has any meaning. Dharma is therefore that all-encompassing order that goes so far as to include even that which denies it, and which consists in the well-balanced hierarchy of the four goals of man, as well as in a respect for the hierarchy and proper delineation of the four varṇas. Even at this, the most comprehensive level of the notion, dharma is the business of the Brahman: it is his task to see that the totality of the cosmic order is respected. Therefore he regulates the conditions within which a man may attain sannyāsa: theoretically, this is possible only for a household master who has had a grandson, so that his descendance is ensured. This is the *sine qua non* in order for mokṣa to take its place in the overall dharma without disturbing it. Withdrawal from society requires that a man should have performed all his social duties, paid off all his congenital debts. Naturally, exceptions are provided for, not to wipe these debts off the slate, but so that they can be redeemed without passing through the householder stage, by directly attaining the state of sannyāsin. For it has to be possible for everyone's desires—kāma—to be realized, including the desire for liberation. That is why many treatises of dharma—of which *The Laws of Manu* (*Mānavadharmaśāstra*) is the best known as well as the most orthodox—include a chapter on the 'renouncer'.

It is again this comprehensive sense of the word dharma which makes the Brahman the legislator of artha and kāma. Given the close

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relationship between the first and second varṇas, it is not surprising to see a chapter on the dharma of the king appearing in treatises of dharma; these chapters deal mainly with the conditions which make a king a good king, one who is respectful of the objective order and of his superiors, the Brahmans. But one is less prepared for seeing the Brahmans dealing with artha and kāma for themselves. Yet the fact is that the sole treatise on artha that is known to us is attributed to a Brahman. The same is true of the famous *Kāma Sūtra* (Aphorisms on Love); and also of the many collections of rules of *nīti* (literally, 'conduct'), which complement the treatise on artha, but are addressed more generally to every man who pursues any material end and seeks success above all.

It is perhaps here that our own system of values is liable to be a real obstacle to an understanding of India. Implicitly, we set dharma—in the narrower sense of the term to which we shall shortly return—in opposition to artha and kāma, as we would the sphere of values to that of the real, semi-instinctive needs of the empirical individual. We see values as structuring all our needs, imposing transcendent norms which often hinder the satisfaction of our needs. So, while we find ourselves confronted with the painful reality which teaches us that many concrete situations flout morality and religion, we nevertheless cling obstinately to a realm where ideal values hold sway. This is not the Indian view of things. The fact that artha and kāma are inferior to dharma does not imply that they must, of necessity, yield to the dictates of dharma. Dharma does not present itself as an order of values which permeates everything, but, in its broadest sense, as a structuring of the whole of reality which leaves room for the levels of material interest and sexual desire. These are also levels of value at the same time as (and because), they are levels of reality which retain their relative autonomy. In the treatises of dharma, as in those of artha and kāma, one finds the same concern for the social hierarchy and for dharma, but also the same affirmation that none of the three ends, not even dharma, must be pursued to the detriment of the others. For us this is another reminder that dharma is not a demand of a moral type as opposed to the other two ends, but that it is itself only one of the ends pursued, limiting the others only from outside but not affecting their intrinsic nature. Without this, we would be incapable of understanding, for example, how it is that time and

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time again in Indian literature—and in the epic literature in particular—a woman can call upon a man to yield to her desire, her kāma, out of an imperative made *in the name of dharma*: if she is not immediately satisfied, she will die. The dharma invoked here is dharma in the most comprehensive sense of the word (which has a place for each of the goals of man) but it could also be the dharma specific to the Kṣatriyas—a third sense of the term which will shortly be discussed—since the hero to whom the woman appeals is a prince. Thus the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Nītiśastras* and the *Kāma Sūtra* are works which deal essentially with the rules of conduct which give success in business (that of the kingdom or personal business) and in love. There is no man living in the world who does not desire wealth, no king who does not seek to enlarge his power and ensure the security of his possessions, no human being who does not desire another human being. Here one has to formulate things in the most general way possible: in particular, amorous desire includes homosexual desire, which also has to find satisfaction and on which there is, in principle, no taboo.

Discussion of dharma in its most comprehensive sense has quite naturally led me to allude to dharma in a narrower sense. Dharma in this narrower definition is the end which, for each individual, must take its place between mokṣa on the one hand and artha and kāma on the other. Mokṣa is not of this world, whereas artha and kāma are concerned with visible realities, immediate and tangible satisfactions. Dharma is then the order of the invisible realities within the triple world, everything which requires of man a ritual activity or behaviour governed by something other than immediate satisfaction, a relationship to the inhabitants of the other worlds and to those of this world whom he cannot see. This is another way of saying that it is the religion of man living in the world, but a religion which is added to the rest of reality rather than that which transforms it. Here we are far removed from the lyrical or nostalgic celebrations of so-called 'primitive', 'cosmic' or 'natural' religions, as well as from their concept of an omnipresent sacred. It is likely that the sacred is present, for a Hindu, in many situations from which it is completely absent in the West. But the counterpart of this is that there exists a profane realm, that one may enjoy without afterthought, once it has been duly encompassed by the sacred as if by a rampart. We already know, moreover, that the Brahman is

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both the priest of this religion and the cleric who teaches all of its essential tenets. It is also the area which we have seen constituting brahman in the social sense of the word: *Brahman* is the administration of dharma, and the power which this presupposes. In this sense, the artha and kāma (in the sense of 'object of desire' and no longer 'desire') that we enjoy in the present largely depend on how we have observed dharma in the past: they are in fact the essential forms of happiness which man pursues in this world, and happiness is the fruit of the merits—again dharma (i.e., the result of the observance of dharma)— accumulated previously, in an earlier life. Conversely, unhappiness in artha and kāma stems from demerits in a past life.

The treatises on dharma in fact merge the two levels of dharma, and the reason for this soon becomes clear when one turns to a third level which is again partially confused with the first two: the hierarchical vision of human society immediately implies that dharma does not have identical content for each human group. Each has its own dharma, its *svadharma*. This follows from the distribution of functions, as outlined in Chapter I. There, svadharma appeared simply as the social function that each varṇa performed within brahmanic society: for the Brahman, there is *Brahman*, the saçerdotal function; for the Kṣatriya, kṣatra, the martial and princely function; for the Vaiśya, trade and agriculture; and for the Śūdra, the service of the higher varṇas, which implies submission to their values. The definition is absolutely constant, since it is found without any variation both in the *Laws of Manu* and in the *Arthaśāstra*.

But the same thing can now be formulated in terms of the 'goals of man'—the *puruṣārthas*—and this to our eyes is somewhat paradoxical. First of all, we should note the appearance of the term *artha* in this expression. It is translated here, in its broadest sense, as 'goal', 'goal pursued', 'object aimed at' (as such it is also used to designate what we call the meaning of a word: in fact, the things that are aimed at, pointed to, in talking). In a narrower sense, it is the goal which fits in between dharma and kāma. Initially, the four goals of man concern every individual man, and one might suppose that only the relation to dharma and mokṣa varies with the social category. In broad terms, each individual has a relationship to all four goals, even if this requires taking into account his whole series

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of successive lives. But the lower one descends in the social hierarchy, the more the real goals that a man can pursue are the immediate goals of artha and kāma. Thus the man who is the individual *par excellence* in terms of his daily activities and aspirations would be the Śūdra; strictly, there would be no individual except in the most empirical sense of the word, closest to the psycho-physiological level. However, the notion of svadharma significantly modifies this view, by imposing another structure on the puruṣārthas, and above all by bringing back into the theory of them the question of the social group; for at no level is the focus on the individual alone.

The correspondences drawn between svadharma and the puruṣārthas are anything but an artificial theory, some mechanical extension of the classifications and equivalences in which Hindu thought excels. Were this not the case, one would have sought, for better or worse, to generate a term-for-term relationship between the four varṇas and the four puruṣārthas. That does not exist, even if, as will become apparent, one has to assign dharma to the svadharma of the Brahman and artha to that of the Kṣatriya. But it is kāma that constitutes the most remarkable case. Though its theory is presented in only one text, the notion of kāma is omnipresent in Indian speculation and gives rise to philosophico-religious doctrines and practices in which it has a central role.

Love: women's duty

It will come as no surprise to be told that Indian civilization, like all others, is resolutely seen from the standpoint of man and that within it woman is an eternal minor. But this has probably never anywhere meant that woman did not have her indispensable and duly recognized place. The codes of laws such as that of Manu are strewn with remarks on the subject, and it is almost always a question of regulating men's attitude to women. The general opinion on women ranges from the theme of female fickleness to praise of the faithful wife—*satī*—who, in a household, is the equal of the goddess Śrī, a goddess who combines beauty, wealth and prosperity, since she is inseparable from strict observance of dharma. It is nonetheless somewhat surprising to find that woman is primarily described, for better or worse, in relation to the man on

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whom she depends, her husband, and second as a mother; this might be an indication that the famous all-purpose concept of the 'goddess-mother' does not have the religious importance which modern scholarship has sought to give it in India. It is true that she has to be a procreator, and especially give sons to her husband, who will need them in the life hereafter, but she can do so only if there is mutual attraction between the spouses (for example, *Manu*, III, 60–61). Thus the reproductive function is subordinated to the satisfaction of desire; there is a multitude of myths which tend to show this and which even give the initiative in desire to the woman (see p. 44). And so it is legitimate to say that the perfect woman, the satī—who appears in nineteenth century English literature as the widow who throws herself on her husband's funeral pyre—has love as her first duty, or to use a more homogeneous language, love as her svadharma. Of course, a woman's dharma is not usually expressed in this way. Her duty is summed up in a formula: to serve her husband as her principal god. However, when one knows the central place of amorous desire in the marriage bond, the deduction is self-evident and is in no way theoretical.

As is well known, prostitutes must make a more particular study of kāma, since their occupation deals with kāma. This means—and a similar modification will be seen for artha—that, despite the universally acknowledged hierarchy of the goals of man, they must attach more importance to kāma than to the other goals. It is another way of expressing their svadharma in a context in which the individual is always absorbed by his or her function. One cannot imagine the care of the kāma of all being entrusted to women without the latter having kāma as their main personal goal (although the *Treatise of Kāma* shows them also preoccupied by their earnings—artha!). But this does not only concern prostitutes: all women, including girls before their marriage, must study at least the practice of kāma. The *Kāma Sūtra* is the only traditional treatise to which they have access in fact and in theory, since, in the other areas of life, a woman is only an extension of her father before marriage and of her husband therefore. Here, women have some initiative, an existence of their own. Vātsyāyana, the Brahman of the *Kāma Sūtra*, tells us so. And we may take his word for it. According to tradition, he wrote this work when he had attained the state of

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'renouncer', perhaps at Benares, in other words at an advanced age when he himself expected nothing other than liberation, mokṣa. How could a treatise so full of wisdom have been written by anyone other than a renouncer who had crossed over to the far shore of human passions?

In fact the scope of the book is much broader than the description of the sexual practices immortalized in stone by the Khajuraho temples and some others. It is explicitly stated that if a treatise on kāma is necessary, it is because all human conduct is subject both to norms—essentially those of dharma—and to technical rules, and that man and woman cannot make love to each other in the same way as the mating of beasts. Even in this area, what distinguishes humans from animals is their capacity to follow a model which is provided by the brahmanic tradition, the only way of ensuring success. Thus one of the author's first preoccupations is to state the rules of dharma which must be observed in order for the pursuit of amorous desire to be fulfilled in pleasure without entailing misfortunes. One must not solicit a married woman, according to dharma, unless she has been twice married (the second marriage is not dharmic), unless she has had five lovers, etc. The rules to be followed in order for a marriage to be dharmic are given rapidly, undoubtedly less meticulously than in the *Laws of Manu*. Legitimate wives receive their share of advice for preserving their virtue, i.e. their fidelity to their husbands, but also for maintaining their husbands' love for them, and from the initial dharmic situation, the text moves gradually into practical rules which have nothing to do with dharma, still less with what we would call morality. A wife may stop at nothing to drive away women who attract her husband or to win back the favours of a husband who has married other and younger wives. All conceivable situations are envisaged, and all the valid remedies are proposed. At the other extreme, prostitutes—whom the pursuit of kāma might lead far from all dharma—must redeem themselves by pious donations such as, building temples, water tanks and gardens, giving cows to Brahmans, holding expensive ceremonies and feasts in honour of a god, all of which are far from fictitious. Inscriptions confirm that this was part of the habitual practices of prostitutes (especially the temple prostitutes, *devadāsī*) as well as of kings.

In this way, success comes to be all that matters, once the

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constraints of dharma on kāma have been reduced to a minimum. The *Treatise of Kāma* goes even beyond this, forgetting its dharmic checks and acting as if they did not exist at all. This has to be understood rather as the specialists in Vedic sacrifice endeavour to clear the Revelation of any hint of contradiction; for, despite the general obligation of ahiṃsā—'non-violence'—one finds that rites of 'black magic' intended to destroy an enemy are taught in the Revelation. How can these two teachings be reconciled? The answer is always as follows: it is forbidden to want to kill someone, but if a man is sufficiently blinded by anger or hatred, then he is shown which rite he can resort to, in order to satisfy his feeling. Without enjoining him to kill his enemy, the revealed prescription gives him the means of having his way, at his own risk, of course. If subsequently, in this life or another, a great misfortune befalls him, it will be the consequence of the rite he has performed. So even in the Revelation one finds information which belongs to the practical art of acting in such a way as to achieve a given result. This is true *a fortiori* of the *Kāma Sūtra* which is part of the Tradition.

On the other hand, the *Treatise* does not forget that the term *kāma* designates every form of desire, every object of desire, every sensory as well as sensual satisfaction. So a woman, and more especially a prostitute, must be expert in the art of satisfying all the senses—all the senses of her husband, her lover, or her client. Flowers, ointments and perfumes, music, song and dance, cuisine and needlework, are naturally part of the artifices and are put to the service of love, and what is so new about that? Or is it the arrangement in a systematic treatise that surprises us? But a woman's skills must go much further, and more especially, no doubt, those of the prostitute, although the distinction is not made: she must possess every sort of practical and theoretical knowledge (architecture, cock-fighting, languages, parlour games, etc.) that will make her company agreeable and entertaining on all occasions.

Love itself is described in the most minute detail. Not only are men and women divided into categories based on their intimate anatomy, and the chances of success of their union evaluated on the basis of this classification, but all the games of love, all the practices of seduction, all the possible (even acrobatic) forms of sexual union are meticulously enumerated. The author of the treatise never deviates from his role of guru. His aim is never to arouse, but only

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to instruct. He has the good sense to add, after some particularly erudite descriptions, that passion has no need of method . . . . It is difficult to say what sort of audience Vātsāyana's *Treatise* had in the classical period of Hindu civilization. But love poetry and the poetry of amorous devotion draw inspiration from it and it can scarcely be doubted that it has profoundly influenced women's behaviour. One only has to watch the actresses in modern Indian films: the sideways glances and fluttering gestures seem incongruous in otherwise seemingly virtuous heroines. Let us admit that the effect is not entirely to our own taste. But it has to be added that the modern Hindu reader of the *Kāma Sūtra* is no more innocent than the Western reader, if he ever was. In reality it is perhaps not very accurate to speak of the influence of the *Treatise of Love*: like so many other works, it has to be seen as a link in a long tradition. The text is not well established and the historical identity of the author is thoroughly obscure. It is likely that at no time did it constitute a literary event, but that it was the formalization, perhaps by stages, of a traditional art which women handed down to one another (and which was not unknown to men. That would only give more significance to this unique treatise in the cultural context in which it came into being. When we come to examine its religious extensions, we shall take care not to see it as their determinant cause: it is only part of a larger whole which is consonant and, no doubt, contemporary with it. One must also be careful not to see it as the source of a language in which certain religious conceptions were later expressed, in the way in which the *Song of Songs* was used—at a distance of many centuries—by the Christian mystics. There is a deeper relationship between this vision of human love and its religious transposition or utilization. It is probably no exaggeration to say that, in each area, a similar anthropology is being formulated. Thus, identifying the impressions which predominate, for us, in reading the *Kāma Sūtra*, may help us to understand the religious importance of kāma.

I shall concentrate on just two, which are moreover closely interrelated, although for a Western reader they may seem contradictory. First of all, if so much importance is attached to erotic techniques, this is because it is only a question of the most physical aspect of love. It would be a mistake to reverse the situation and to say that the *Treatise of Kāma* explicitly limits its

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scope to physical love. But it is no accident that love literature is always strongly erotic in character or that so many myths feature encounters between an ascetic exhausted by long privations and a nymph sent by the gods to tempt him: the wind only has to help by lifting the nymph's clothing and the ascetic quickly succumbs. That does not imply that deeper attachment is always absent, although polygamy must have repercussions which it is difficult for us to assess. But it is exactly as if such a feeling did not exist, or did not count. Affection clearly exists between mother and child, or between friends. As soon as a man and a woman are involved, legitimately married or not, it is physical attraction that is described, or else the text moves immediately to the level of the obligations of dharma.

In another context, this might mean the supremacy of the male viewpoint and a maximum of brutality. In India, on the contrary—and this is the second observation—conquest of a woman is nothing if it does not have as its consequence a shared pleasure. One should no doubt regard as a literary commonplace the complaints of Bhartṛhari in the *Śatakatraya* (*The Three Texts of One Hundred Verses*), in which the man seems rather the victim of female seduction, a consenting victim moreover. The author's disillusioned philosophy has something to do with this: his long 'meditation' on love (*Hundred Verses on Passionate Love*) and its undoing (*Hundred Verses on Detachment*) , presupposes the doctrine of the *Kāma Sūtra* and shows, like the epic myths, that the love of women is the main obstacle to the quest for liberation (how close we are here to the temptations of Saint Anthony!). However, on the theoretical plane which is that of the *Treatise of Love*, woman is neither a dominator nor a passive instrument; she is the necessary and respected partner. Her own desire must match that of the man and find its satisfaction at the same time as his: the anatomical considerations and the classification of men and women which Vātsyāyana indulges in have no other aim than this. The experience of love is analysed as a self-dispossession, a fusion with the partner. For each partner, it is the other's pleasure which counts, and it is this sharing of pleasure which makes it possible to use expressions like 'to be but a single thought' to describe the effect of the union of bodies: 'In the world, the fruit of love is the forging of one consciousness out of two. If love leaves the consciousness (of each

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lover) separate, it is as if union had occurred between two corpses' (*Hundred Verses on Passionate Love*, 29). The importance of this formulation cannot be over-estimated: far from seeing it as the cause of certain religious currents, one is more inclined to see it as the analogue of Hindu mystical experiences and techniques, in which the couple reproduces the union of God and nature. Indeed, the texts make no mystery about this: 'When thought is not reabsorbed in the act of love and in yogic concentration—*samādhi*—what is the point of meditation—*dhyāna*? What is the point of the act of love?' (*Śārṅgadharapaddhati*). By the same token, this view is diametrically opposed to Greek or Roman conceptions in which woman is either the mother of children or the instrument of man's pleasure. At the same time, it has nothing in common with courtly love. India has invented her own solution to the relation between the sexes. The Indian notion of the couple reminds us both that the individual is nothing by himself and, consequently, that the specifically psychological characteristics of the individual are never valorized. The emphasis on physical love is in fact the Indian form of the humanization of sexuality.

So we return to the starting-point, in which kāma was seen as the svadharma of women: they were no more able than other members of society to achieve existence by demanding autonomy. They find their place only by fully assuming their role as sexual partners, and it is in this area that they become truly complementary to men, whereas in other areas—including motherhood—they are only extensions of men. But the social role that women thereby acquire—as wives, mistresses or prostitutes—leads to no 'sublimation', because it is essentially linked to physical love. Kāma does indeed remain a fundamental desire of the human being, which has to receive satisfaction at its own level. The 'egoistic' aspect—the individual desire to be satisfied—is maintained in its entirety, even at the theoretical level, and all possible sexual deviations are provided for to deal with every situation: for example, the women of the royal harem, too numerous for the one man to whom they are tied, must resort to other means to obtain sexual satisfaction, and here too, all means are legitimate.

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The craft of kingship

Artha is the business of Kṣatriyas, kings, just as kāma is entrusted to women. But the two ends, which represent the greater part of enjoyment in this world, are not unrelated to each other. For one thing, kings have a good measure of kāma since, thanks to the artha they possess, they can have all the women they desire in the kingdom; and for another, to say that the artha of the kingdom is made their responsibility amounts to saying—and this is how it is sometimes phrased in the epics—that they enable their subjects to pursue in peace the ends common to all men. One of the mythic forms in which a king's failure to do his duty is sometimes expressed is the killing, while hunting, of a male animal about to couple with a female. He has not allowed a creature to satisfy its desire, giving priority to his own desire, a passion for hunting, which is a royal vice deriving from kāma. It is the extreme case of blameworthy violence, which it is all the more important to highlight since a king, by virtue of his function, must commit acts of violence.

The svadharma of kings is by far the one which raises the most problems, for this reason it gives rise to a vast literature that is at once didactic and mythic—the two great epics of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*—as well as the more technical text of the *Arthaśāstra*, the collections of aphorisms on *nīti*, the 'art of conducting oneself' or 'of conducting' (one's affairs or those of the kingdom), and the chapters in the treatises of dharma dealing with the dharma of kings.

Two aspects of artha are self-evident for every Hindu consciousness. Artha, everything which is material wealth, i.e. prosperity, is desired by every man living in the world. As well as 'goal' and 'interest', *artha* means 'that which is good, useful'. Material goods are useful to this life; they are good as objects of enjoyment and as instruments of power. But at the same time, they are difficult to acquire and preserve; concern for one's artha is for every man an occasion for using force and violence; if success is sought above all, there may be no alternative means. This observation may well be one of the self-evident facts of life which the Hindu accepts with the same realism which leads him to give its full place to sexual desire. But this is not all: it would be impossible to understand the care the

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Brahmans take to free the king from every restriction in administering the artha of the kingdom if one did not at the same time refer to the figure of the ideal Brahman as indicated in the treatises of dharma: the svadharma of the king and that of the Brahman are more than ever complementary and opposed, since the former justifies the use of force and of all the apparatus which surrounds it, whereas the latter, as we shall shortly see, forbids self-defence against a direct attack. It might therefore be said that, up to a point, the Brahman denies himself the pursuit of artha, allowing the Kṣatriya to look after it for him (which is not the same thing as renouncing it), while the Kṣatriya is obliged to act in ways contrary to dharma in order to defend the artha of all.

Some have compared the *Arthaśāstra* to Machiavelli's *Prince* and claimed to see in it a teaching divergent from that of the treatises of dharma; but that is an over-simplification. First of all, it must be remembered that, because he is the guardian of artha, the king also has artha as his main end in his own right, in spite of the recognized hierarchy: once again, the individual is identified with his function, and it cannot be otherwise from the Hindu standpoint. But that does not exclude him from dharma—on the contrary. The Kṣatriya's function, in terms of dharma in which *Kṣatra* is the complement of *Brahman*, is to protect the inhabitants of his kingdom, with his life if necessary, and he cannot do this without punctiliously performing the religious duties of his status. It has already been seen that he is the 'sacrificer' *par excellence*, who must offer numerous sacrifices and generously reward the Brahmans who officiate, and that, for all his skill and efforts, he cannot ensure the prosperity of the kingdom without doing so. This prosperity is nothing other than the possibility given to each inhabitant of the kingdom of pursuing his three ends in peace. It would be unacceptable for the royal function, so central to the maintenance of the social order, not to be fully integrated into the socio-cosmic order, dharma, which unites heaven and earth, the gods and men. Having said this, the domain of artha also constitutes a plane of visible realities subject to specific techniques, in which success is the only genuine norm. In this respect, the king's attitude is little different from that of any man who pursues artha. That is why the *Nītiśāstra* (*Treatises on the practical rules of conduct*) or the *Rājanītiśāstra* (*Treatises on the practical rules of royal conduct*),

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which are collections of aphorisms, include maxims of folk wisdom applicable to every man as well as advice appropriate only to kings. In the aphorisms, the word *rājā*, 'king', is often replaced by *naraḥ*, 'man'. There is nonetheless a difference between the king and any other man. The latter only pursues his *sva-artha*, his personal interest, whereas the king looks after the artha of all while simultaneously pursuing his own artha (essentially the exercise of power). More than the use of techniques which seem alien to dharma from the Hindu standpoint and incompatible with morality from our standpoint, it is therefore the slippage from the advancement of the artha of all to the king's personal interest, *svārtha*, which constitutes the conceptual difficulty to Western eyes. 'Raison d'état' is not a very reputable notion for us, although it is in common use, but it becomes quite unacceptable when it really refers to the personal interest of the power-holder. The Hindu mind does not perceive this duplicity in the same way, and cannot do so, since it identifies the individual with his social function.

The *Mahābhārata* offers us one example, among others, which may save us from a misunderstanding on this point: in Book I (Chapter 140), Prince Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who, according to dharma, is unfit to reign because of his blindness,[1] wants to flout the prohibition and above all to secure for his sons the succession to the throne on the death of his brother Pāṇḍu, although Pāṇḍu's eldest son, Yudhiṣṭhira[2] is the rightful heir. Having decided in his heart to give way to the pressure of his own eldest son, the wicked Duryodhana, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks his Brahman minister, Kaṇika, to advise him on the attitude he should take towards his nephews, particularly the eldest, whom he has himself enthroned and whom the people are acclaiming as their king. Dhṛtarāṣṭra does not ask the Brahman whether he should accept Yudhiṣṭhira as king or revolt against him; in terms of dharma, there is no point in asking the question since the answer is obvious. And so he goes straight to the level of artha: should he adopt a friendly or a hostile attitude? The unspoken implication is: in order to win the throne, for himself and his son. That is how Kaṇika understands the question, and his response leaves no doubt. The epic text says of his words that they give the answer of the *Treatises of Royalty*–the *rājaśāstras*—(v.4.). So if Dhṛtaraṣṭra wishes to triumph, he must not allow Yudhiṣṭhira

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to consolidate his authority, and the means at his disposal are expressed in a form that is taken, quite literally for the most part, from the *Nītiśāstra* tradition. They are presented in the aphoristic style proper to the genre: 'He should make a bow of grass and feign sleep like a hunter of antelopes. When he has brought the enemy under his power by persuasion or by any other means, he should kill him. He should not treat with compassion one who comes seeking shelter. It is in this very way that one becomes divested of all obstacles: there is nothing to fear from a dead man.' (*Mahābhārata*, 1.140, 13–14). What is most surprising to us is perhaps the fact that it takes a Brahman to give such advice. To be sure, he would never give such advice to another Brahman, but when he is preaching to a prince, his audacity knows no bounds: 'A son, a friend, a brother, a father or even a guru, if they behave like enemies, should be killed by him who desires success. He may kill an enemy with a curse, with a gift of riches (to an intermediary), or with poison or trickery. In no wise should one be negligent . . .' (1.140, 52–53). Here the pursuit of artha entails a flagrant violation of dharma: no one is sacred in the eyes of a man who seeks his interest, although, for the Hindu mind, the murder of a father or a guru is the most heinous crime imaginable. In this particular case, personal interest, svārtha, comes a long way before raison d'état, but Kaṇika does not seek to distinguish these subtleties. He replies in terms of the technical rules which must be applied by anyone who seeks to triumph over an enemy or, in terms more worthy of a prince, to win a victory.

The problem which then arises is how to situate this advice from a Brahman in relation to dharma. If the king may or must behave in a manner contrary to dharma, in a situation in which the very end he pursues is contrary to dharma (since he is blind), how can a Brahman consent to advise him? The name Kaṇika in fact probably has a pejorative value, since it means 'little speck, thing of little worth', which might suggest that the wicked prince has consulted a worthless Brahman so as to obtain from him the approval he seeks. However, the epic, whose brahmanic orthodoxy cannot be impugned, leaves no room for such an interpretation. Indeed, in Book XII one finds a speech that is partially identical in form and very similar in substance, in a radically different context.

In Chapter 140 (in the section on *āpaddharma*, 'dharma for times

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of distress', and not the section on *rājadharma*), it is the thoroughly dharmic Prince Bhīṣma who, shortly before his death, speaks these words of artha to the no less dharmic Yudhiṣṭhira. These *ultima verba* coming from such a totally disinterested character are explicitly intended to show a king's duty in times of distress: Yudhiṣṭhira has asked him in what circumstances a prince may violate dharma and how far he may go in such transgression. The following chapters deal with the āppaddharma of the Brahman, so there is no ambiguity about the scope of Bhīṣma's advice. Not only is Kaṇika's language in no way moderated in Bhīṣma's mouth, but he attributes the doctrine he teaches to the Brahman Bhāradvāja or Kaniṅka Bhāradvāja (distorted in some texts to 'Kaṇika', but it is certainly the same person). Kaṇiṅka Bhāradvāja is well known as an expert on artha and is quoted several times in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, where he seems to represent the most extreme views on artha. Thus, in a situation of distress, the ordinary rules of royal dharma—for example, those which bind the king to his father, his guru or his son, if ever they were to turn against him—no longer apply. If the king is in danger of losing his throne or even his life, he moves down from dharma to artha, that is, to rules designed to ensure practical success, without other considerations. Bhīṣma does not pause for a single moment to consider what we would call the 'legitimacy' of the case in order to qualify his advice, nor does he distinguish the threat to the king's throne from the danger of death. It is clearly impossible to separate the artha of the kingdom, which the king must preserve, from the svārtha of the same king. If one applies the rule which is stated in the following chapters on the Brahman's dharma in times of distress, it can be said that the king's sole object is to return by any means to a situation in which he can perform his regal function in the closest possible conformity with dharma. But it is all too clear that there is only a difference of degree between a dharmic and an un-dharmic king, and that the very nature of artha irremediably compromises a king without entailing moral reprobation. In the epic, it is Yudhiṣṭhira's cause—the cause of dharma, therefore—which triumphs, not becaue it is intrinsically just, but because Viṣṇu and the gods, who are the ultimate upholders of the socio-cosmic order, do all that is required to make it triumph, using disreputable tactics of artha when the need arises.

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Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Dharma, shrinks in horror from the prospects opened up for him by his great-uncle Bhīṣma. The solution for him, since he refuses to violate dharma, would not be to govern more 'virtuously' than others, but to renounce the throne and become a sannyāsin. He has no illusions: a king, by virtue of being a king, has to get his hands dirty, but this judgement is based on a standard which is not of this world, the one which, beyond dharma, leads to mokṣa. The epic mythology abounds with legitimate heirs who renounce the throne to become sannyāsins. But the consequences of this action are always disastrous for the kingdom: twelve years' drought and famine, social unrest, defeat in war and so on. A Kṣatriya's dharma requires him to dirty his hands: the classical doctrine seems to have moved away from the Upaniṣadic teaching which saw Brahmans and princes vying in knowledge of ātman-*Brahman*.

Portrait of the ideal Brahman

The svadharma of the Brahman, because it relates to dharma in all senses of the word, makes dharma his main goal. One is immediately inclined to think that his specific dharma would be by far the most demanding. In theory, he must teach and not merely study the Veda, and sacrifice on behalf of others, for the king in particular, and not merely for himself. But the classical tradition goes much further: when Manu (to cite but one authority) describes each of the four 'stages of life' through which the members of the three higher varṇas should in principles pass, it very soon becomes apparent that for him the term 'twice-born' only refers to the Brahman. And the Brahman is the only one who seems to be subject to the law of the four 'stages of life'. It might even be said that he is so much the guardian of dharma that he is also the only one to practice it. It is useful to take a closer look, especially since this monopoly of dharma only better prepares the Brahman to become a sannyāsin in the last stage of his life, whereas the Kṣatriya seems condemned to the impurity of secular tasks until he dies.

We have already seen (p. 30 ff.) that the Brahman of brahmanic theory sought to appropriate for himself certain elements from the figure of the sannyāsin. Beyond this, and as a means to adapting the two ideals to each other, he probably invented an intermediate

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model, the *vānaprastha* or 'forest dweller', representing a third, and fictional, stage of life. It is significant that this model corresponds fairly well to the mythic *ṛṣi*—'seer'—of the epic, a Brahman living in the forest with his wife and children, devoted to ritual activities, expert in Vedic science, but more particularly versed in the *Āraṇyakas* (see chapter 2).

However, the treatises of dharma unambiguously regard the householder stage as the most important one, the one on which the others—even that of sannyāsin—are dependent. The Brahman remains a figure of this world, at least during the middle period of his life, the longest in principle. He is not even yet vegetarian in theory, but all his meals have been transformed into sacrifices to enable him not only to consume meat (particularly in the meals offered to the ancestors) but also to expiate all the minor murders of minute creatures entailed by domestic life. The practice of the five 'major sacrifices' is in this respect a masterpiece of systematization. The ritual texts apparently see them as a kind of classification of sacrificial activities. By contrast, the *Dharmaśāstra* reduce them to a symbolic grouping, one which is unimportant as regards implementation but central by virtue of its signification. If one compares them with the internalized forms of sacrifice described in the *Āraṇyakas*, halfway along the path to renunciation, one is led to see the 'major sacrifices' as another attempt at transforming the sacrifices, while still retaining their outward form and 'worldly' efficacy. Apparently the only one which remains intact is the sacrifice to *Brahman* which consists of a recitation of the Vedic texts learnt during the period of study. At the same time it has to be noted that the sacrifice to *Brahman* was perhaps rather the teaching than the recitation of the Veda. In the treatises of dharma, it is study of the text that is foregrounded, since it forms the main part of the first 'stage of life', that of the brahmanic student; the function of teacher does not reappear in the description of the householder, although it is known that it in fact continued to exist. As for the other four 'major sacrifices', they are associated with meals. The Brahman, who otherwise carefully avoids touching the remains of food because they are impure, cannot in fact partake of a meal until he has offered it to the gods, the ancestors, all creatures (especially the disquieting creatures of the invisible world) and any guests who have arrived (sannyāsins, brahmanic students, strangers etc.). He

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must even feed his whole household before himself. This food offered to others constitutes so many sacrifices, the remains of which he will then eat. Sacrificial activity is thus reduced to a minimum, but its efficacy is maximum: all beings are associated with it, the gods and the ancestors are satisfied, dangerous beings propitiated, the socio-cosmic order is assured, at the same time as involuntary 'murders' are expiated. One has to admire the ingenuity of the Brahmans who have thus succeeded in combining, in a very simplified rite, the essential part of their role according to dharma with the concern for ahiṃsā which they received from the sannyāsin.

However, the treatises of dharma still insist on ancestor worship. Ancestors, unlike the gods, seem not to be satisfied with the offering of their share of the daily meals. They also call for special meals on fixed dates, after having received funerals which have transformed them into ancestors. Ancestral rites still continue today among the Brahmans, and even in other castes, but the beliefs which underlie them are particularly difficult to reconcile. Originally, it was a matter of feeding the ancestor in his abode in the other world, the abode of the dead or heaven. But the Brahman, adopting the sannyāsin's belief in rebirths and liberation, is no longer sure where to place his ancestors. He nonetheless continues to offer them food while praying for their liberation (where they no longer need the fruits of the earth). Membership of the lineage is certainly one of the strongest social linkages, the one which appears last when the sannyāsin leaves the world: he himself is freed from all obligations, but his son will worship him after his death. However, the rite is transformed, and the dominant idea is that worship of the dead sannyāsin—who theoretically has no further individual existence but is reabsorbed in the Absolute—is beneficial for his descendants. At this point, liberation is close to being taken over by the world for its own ends.

In fact, the aged Brahman's abandonment of the world has probably always been the exception to the rule, and this only served to keep the ancestral rites more alive. Then it was the theory of karman, originating in sannyāsin circles, that was reversed for the benefit of the man living in the world: for the sannyāsin, past karman weighs on his shoulders and keeps him in the servitude of transmigration, and his chief concern is to cease to accumulate the

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residues of karman for the future, in particular by abandoning all ritual activity—karman (see p. 23 ff.). The distinction between good and bad karman would be quite irrelevant to him, since it is karman as such which is bad. The man living in the world, with the Brahman in the forefront, taking hold of this notion which seems to condemn him to a miserable servitude, develops on the contrary all the positive implications for himself: he changes the gloomy prospects into possibilities of a brilliant future and, far from seeking to suppress karman, he accumulates all the merits that it allows him, thus ensuring for himself good future rebirths. In this new perspective, the Brahman finds some satisfaction: not only can he attribute his present Brahman existence to his past merits, but he is the best placed both to obtain liberation and to secure the best rebirths as a Brahman. His concern for ritual purity, the exactness of his observances, his present 'sannyāsic' virtues—non-violence, veracity, honesty—help to orient his mind naturally, as it were, towards liberation up to the moment when he will renounce everything and seek *Brahman* alone. In practice, he alone is equipped for sannyāsa, unless he prefers to store up his merits for future lives. The *Dharmaśāstra* thus tend to 'consolidate' karman, to see the 'good' always reborn good, if they have not sought liberation, and the 'wicked' perpetuate themselves in their wickedness and their lower social status.

This ambiguity of the role of karman can be seen in all the philosophical systems. But it is particularly apparent, within the different nuances of Vedānta, in the discussions of the respective roles of rites and knowledge (of ātman-*Brahman*) in obtaining liberation. If the sannyāsin is ultimately always a Brahman, the farewell to the world is itself a rite, and it is clear that the values of the man-in-the-world were bound to force their way into those of the 'renouncer', as the Brahman living in the secular world sought to resemble the sannyāsin. In any case, the mere fact that the question of the role of rites in the journey towards liberation is raised —even if salvation is seen (as it is by Śaṅkara) only in total renunciation of rites—shows clearly that such a philosophy is closely bound up with the brahmanic universe. We started out from the idea that the Indian 'renouncer' could only be understood in terms of the man-in-the-world that he had been or might have been. The whole history of brahmanic thought—and we shall shortly

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reach the same conclusion for the whole of Hindu thought—confirms this premise. It is therefore logical that some great sages of Vedānta maintain a sort of balance between rites and knowledge or even, like the 'non-dualist' Maṇḍana or the 'dualist' Madhva, opt for life in the world. This having been said, modern Hindu masters subscribe totally to the universality of the Vedāntic philosophy. (But then this is no more curious a view than that of the French who might be hard put to allow that Descartes might not be widely followed outside their borders.)

That is not all. The ideal Brahman of the *Dharmaśāstra*, who is therefore a householder, is poor. He must not earn his own living, since all service is seen as degrading—a Śūdra's activity—and so forbidden. Although in theory he is the only one able to receive as well as make gifts, whereas others must give—essentially to the Brahman, but also to any 'renouncer'—Manu recommends as the most perfect path for the householder that he should collect daily only what he needs for that day's subsistence for himself and his dependants. Manu even makes a distinction between the gifts the Brahman receives for himself, which must be extremely pure, and those he receives in order to carry out his sacrificial obligations, on which he may be less punctilious, given the binding nature of his obligations. The strict ideal, however, would be to glean each day the amount of grain needed, and therefore to do without the slightest gift. On this point too, the imitation of the sannyāsin is flagrant, but so too is the contradiction, even at a theoretical level: the role of priest in the sacrifices offered by others, particularly by kings, is expressly mentioned in the definition of the Brahman's svadharma, and the epic is full of such royal sacrifices in which the Brahmans receive substantial fees—*dakṣiṇā*—if they officiate or various gifts if they merely attend. A king's excessive piety is even sometimes symbolized by over-large gifts to the Brahmans or too many sacrifices. Moreover, the texts on ritual give minute descriptions of the liturgical functions of the various categories of Brahmans. Yet the *Laws of Manu* mention only in one word the Brahman's function as officiating priest, and then make no further reference to it. Correspondingly, they do not dwell on the ritual obligations of kings, which require the services of the Brahmans. The emphasis placed on the Brahman's poverty and on the ban on serving tends, on the contrary, to leave a veil of uncertainty over the

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essential features of his activities and his income, in theory and in practice. But it is not certain that the contradiction here comes entirely from the proximity of the sannyāsin: a Brahman's status is bound to be somewhat degraded by the effect of rendering service and taking part in the impure aspects of sacrifice. But the model of the renouncer can only lead him to emphasize purity; the idea of poverty necessarily has the same origin in a society in which so much prestige is attached to money and to ostentatious expenditure.

The sannyāsin model also lies behind the Brahman's total inability to defend himself by force, the use of force being exclusively reserved for kings. This is only one of the applications of non-violence, which is in fact more important in the epic myths than in the theory of dharma. In practice, the Brahman has modelled himself on these contradictory demands, while taking account of harsh reality: he has consented to officiate in the various sacrifices and rites in which his presence was required, accepting the fees associated with them; he has even become priest-in-charge of a temple, which is even more degrading, but may be extremely lucrative. He has demanded proportionately greater remuneration when the function entailed greater risks for his status, for example in funeral rites. Occasionally he may have been greedy. But, as if to compensate, he has become strictly vegetarian—whereas Manu still allowed him to eat meat—and most punctilious about the minor rules of everyday purity, like the sannyāsins.

Ultimately it may wondered if this dharma, which is constantly referred to as the highest goal of man in the world, and as especially entrusted to the care of the Brahman, was ever practised in its pure form. It is rather striking that two commonly used collections of aphorisms, one in Sanskrit, the *Śatakatraya* by Bhartṛhari, the other in Tamil, the *TirukkuRal*,[3] dividing their subject into three sections, deal with nīti (which we have seen to be related to the king), erotic passion and detachment, and with a twofold dharma, that of the householder and that of the renouncer, and with artha and kāma. The *Śatakatraya* shows several times that happiness in this world is to be either a king or a renouncer, one having maximum pleasure on earth, the other having attained peace through outward and inward detachment.

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Two types of men

The way in which the goals of man are distributed in brahmanic orthodoxy results in the formation of two opposed types of men, assigned to complementary tasks. The Kṣatriya, a prince and warrior, is not only committed to the use of force and to the impure works of violence; as the foremost possessor of the wealth of the kingdom, he makes it yield fruit in pious works which ensure the prosperity of all, not least that of the Brahmans. But he also spends it in the pursuit of pleasure, in increasing the number of his wives. Should his non-vegetarian diet be connected with his function of 'sacrificer'? Not necessarily, since he seems to have extended systematically the impure practices into which his functions forced him. The Kṣatriya of the epic is a meat-eater, a drinker of wine to the point of drunkenness,[4] a lover of women, a great hunter—killing for sport, therefore, and not solely out of necessity—a slayer of men in war or otherwise, and ready to die on the field of battle: rough ways and respect for the Brahmans characterize his dharma. These are features which the economically dominant castes of the various regions of India tended to adopt after his example. There is so much continuity in this portrait of the warrior-prince that even today the non-vegetarian restaurants of the east coast of the Deccan are called 'military restaurants'. The wives or concubines of princes, of very variable status, since theoretically only the first need be chosen according to the rules of caste, are assigned to his pleasure, in both the broad and narrow senses of the word: banquets, country outings, water games, music, dancing and the games of love seem to exist only for princes and their wives, if the literature is to be believed. Rich merchants, however, readily imitate them in their pleasures and their extravagances.

By contrast, the Brahman is the man whose social status is linked to purity, who keeps away from every impure person, from everything connected with death. Vegetarian and frugal, respectful of life in all its forms, he eats only with his equals so as to avoid sullying himself—which is not in contradiction with his obligation to consume only the remains of food that has become a sacrificial offering. His life is austere, because of all the observances which surround it and the theoretical absence of wealth. He is indeed the man of dharma, the man whose conduct is shaped by invisible values more than by the pursuit of pleasure or immediate gain. His

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wife—in theory he has only one—is likewise entirely absorbed by her husband's religious duties and must be less concerned with kāma than other women: the wretched Reṇukā, the wife of a celebrated Brahman, but the daughter of a prince, was cursed by her husband when, having gone to fetch water from the river, she lingered on the bank and longingly watched a prince playing in the water surrounded by his wives. In momentarily giving her thoughts to kāma, she fell short of the dharma of her husband, who, for once, gave way to the most violent anger and had his wife decapitated by his son: the wife's momentary frivolity prevented the husband from performing the rite at the prescribed time and provoked his deadly anger. An avalanche of sins! It takes two to be dharmic. But such a condemnation of kāma in the name of dharma in fact betrays the influence of the sannyāsin. One of the truths most often repeated, regardless of varṇa, is that none of the puruṣārthas is to be sacrificed to the others.

These two models are partly theoretical, but they well express the orthodox world view, i.e. that of the Brahmans who hold to the Revelation and the oldest Tradition. Room is made—and duly justified—within it for the 'sacred' and the 'profane' and for the whole range of human aspirations. Indeed, they are so far from pure fiction that they largely inspire the conduct of the other castes, depending on whether they live in the orbit of the princes or the Brahmans. Those who want to raise their social status imitate the Brahmans by avoiding the company of those reckoned to be impure, by restricting their range of choice in making a marriage alliance, by becoming vegetarians. In practice, however, recognition of superior status depends greatly on the Brahmans themselves. If Brahmans make themselves available to officiate in the rites of the group seeking higher status, then that group will see itself, and will eventually be seen by others, as Kṣatriya rather than Śūdra. Its members will wear the sacred thread of the twice-born. That can be done only if at the same time it gains respect by its wealth and influence—of which the Brahmans are the first beneficiaries. The Marāṭhas, for example, in west Deccan, have remained meat-eaters and drinkers of alcohol. But Śivājī, their national hero, obtained royal consecration by the appropriate Vedic rite in the seventeenth century. No one in Mahārāṣṭra would dare call these parvenus 'Śūdras'.

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Renunciation and human love

Since I am endeavouring to emphasize that which differentiates the brahmanic world from our own so as to prevent ethnocentric misreadings, it is perhaps permissible here to mention what would seem to be a constant feature, in an area where one would precisely not expect to find it. Modern westerners attribute to Christianity, and especially to the great centuries of monasticism, an ethic and a spirituality which depreciate sexuality and which exert unbearable pressures on human consciousness, to the point of forcing them into hypocritical positions. We nevertheless know that medieval literature was not entirely clothed in asceticism, and this is even truer of later periods: Pascal is not the whole of the seventeenth century. Yet it would surely be wrong to attribute the sauciest fabliaux or the *Carmina Burana* to overt unbelief. The monastic ideal, on the other hand, was not defined solely by the vow of chastity, and the latter was, moreover, initially defined positively by the need to focus all attention and energy on God, more than by depreciation of women and of sexuality.

Regardless of the modern form this problem has taken, India helps us in a strange way, to look at our own cultural attitudes towards this subject in a better perspective. No one could accuse Indian culture of prudishness, puritanism or inhibition: it has given kāma its proper theoretical place and has declared, in and out of season, that amorous pleasure may not be sacrificed for the sake of supposedly higher aims. It has granted to women their place as partners in the games of love and even demanded that they learn to play their role properly in this sphere. At the same time, parallel to this and at the highest level of the hierarchy of the goals of man, it has allowed for the development of an ideal of religious life and of renunciation of the world. In this context, the exhortation to chastity is at least as strong as in the West, and has been further combined with more or less magical notions concerning the loss of physical strength through sexual activity. In fact, the perspective is very close to that of Christian monasticism, *mutatis mutandis*: Indian kāma is, as we have seen, essentially physical love, and it is the sexual act itself which provokes a weakening of the body and therefore a weakening of the mind which can no longer concentrate on the pursuit of the Absolute. The idea is at bottom the same as

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that of the first desert anchorites: chastity is the pre-condition which makes it possible to concentrate on a single goal. For the renouncer, there is indeed only one goal, mokṣa, which will suffer no dissipation of attention and efforts. It alone is worth sacrificing everything else. The institutionalization of chastity is even much more developed in India than in the West. Before being imposed on the sannyāsin, it is imposed on the young 'brahmanic student'—*brahmacārin*—throughout the whole period during which he has to study the Veda. *Brahmacārin*, literally perhaps, 'he who practises brahman (= Veda)', comes to mean 'committed to chastity', and it is the title borne by those who pass directly from the student stage to that of renouncer, remaining with their guru instead of going home to marry.

It is tempting to think that all the more emphasis has been placed on chastity because love was recognized as a value in the world: worldly values become alien as a whole to one who is renouncing the world, but whereas the break with dharma was difficult to make for high-caste renouncers, the renunciation of kāma has to be much more radical. As has been said in passing, in the myths, it is by provoking a sexual fallibility that the gods rid themselves of a too-powerful ascetic: once again a magical universe is manifested in which the energy accumulated by asceticism is liable to burn up the worlds, but is reduced to nothing by the loss of semen provoked by the sight of an alluring nymph. The fact remains that amorous pleasure truly does symbolize the opposite of renunciation. Moreover, it is through just such a symbolization that it also takes on a religious role in Hinduism: we will return to this point, in a context which, while quite distant from the brahmanic ideal, is one that remains within the same overarching structure. As for the Brahman, he owes it to himself to turn a deaf ear to kāma in the ideal picture he paints of himself, when it is the model of the sannyāsin that he wishes to follow.

So it seems that under all climes—for similar observations would have to be made for all religions which contain some form of renunciation of the world—human love and the pursuit of an Absolute situated somewhere beyond the world have been felt to be antagonistic. Their opposition is, in a way, that of two absolutes, each capable of polarizing all attention. However, whereas the Gospel is content to oppose God and Mammon, brahmanic

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orthodoxy is more radical in opposing kāma and mokṣa, one being solely of this world, the other outside the world. But Hinduism was to rework these elements in all directions, bringing mokṣa into this world by making it possible to live there without kāma and, conversely, seeking mokṣa in kāma. The Brahman would not always be able to endorse these speculations, but it would be difficult for him to deny paternity of the values involved.

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CHAPTER 3

Salvation through Deeds: The Yogin Warrior

We have seen how difficult it was to maintain a univocal meaning for each of the 'goals of man'. Each of the three goals internal to this world can be seen as an all-inclusive value: there is a level at which dharma, as the total socio-cosmic order, has room for the sannyāsin and his specific end of deliverance, while in a more restricted sense it can also be the order, again social and cosmic, which is the condition of the very existence of this world, in which the ordinary man lives, and which requires one to live in harmony with the invisible beings of the 'three worlds'. Artha itself, as a 'goal' of man, may subsume mokṣa and dharma, while in another sense it is articulated with dharma and kāma to form one of the 'natural' leanings of man living in this world: concern for his material interests. Mokṣa is anyway a special case; but, whereas it ought precisely to remain apart from the 'worldly' ends, the Brahmans tended to annex it as the fulfilment of their own dharma, which would have had the effect of making liberation the all-inclusive value of this world, at least from the viewpoint of the first varṇa. This endeavour was fraught with consequences for the future of Hinduism, since the idea of a salvation outside this world was bound to have universalistic implications which tended to undermine the social hierarchy. The elucidation of these implications constitutes a large part of the religious 'history' of India; but here too, the decisive steps escape us in their actual movement and we only see their results: an imposing edifice of many dimensions—cosmogony and cosmology, theology and anthropology—forming the universe of *bhakti*, the religion of devotion. The latter, instead of taking shape alongside brahmanic orthodoxy, subsumed it and adapted its structure to take account of it, in one of those specifically Indian enveloping moves. So the Brahman can find a place for himself and his aristocratic ideas within this universe, if he

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will accept a broader horizon and the universalization of salvation; but he can equally well refuse it in the name of his orthodoxy.

An anthropology of desire

But all this would probably be unintelligible if we did not first pause to consider the subsuming value that kāma can become. When Bhīma, the second of the Pāṇḍavas, the younger brother of Yudhiṣṭhira Dharmarāja,[1] sings the praises of kāma in Book XII of the *Mahābhārata* (Chapter 167), it is an easy matter for him to show that kāma—desire in all its forms—is the basis of all the other ends of man: the man of artha obviously desires material goods and success; but does the man of dharma, with all his observances, have less kāma? That view would not prove tenable for long, since the Revelation is the first to link the sacrificial rites with desires: 'He who desires heaven, may he sacrifice—*svargakāmo yajeta . . .*'. For each rite, the outcome is indicated. He who desires that outcome must perform the rite. The religion of the Brahman—dharma—is therefore in fact full of kāma. Bhīma goes further: the ascetic himself would not leave the world if the desire for liberation did not impel him to do so. Sanskrit here comes to his aid, since the seeker after liberation is designated by means of a desiderative form: the *mumukṣu* is 'he-who-desires-liberation'.[2] Bhīma ('the Redoubtable'), a slayer of ogres and 'wicked' men, but a champion of women, in short a chivalrous brute, is the son of Vāyu, the Wind,[3] and shares his father's extraordinary strength and irascibility. According to the conceptions of the epic, the Wind manifests itself as the breath of life and as movement (XII.247.9). In the company of his brothers, and especially in comparison with Yudhiṣṭhira who is always tempted by deliverance, Bhīma does indeed seem to symbolize love of life on the earth on which his feet are firmly planted. He glorifies everything that his elder brother condemns, and justifies attachment to transmigration. In his own right he personifies the 'man-in-the-world'. But would he be a sufficiently acute 'moralist' to detect the omnipresence of kāma if he had not been invited to do so by the man of renunciation?

Before answering this fundamental question, let us note that the language used by the mythic Bhīma is entirely consistent with the psychology expressed by the philosophical systems. The schema set

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out by Nyāya—the Indian philosophical system which was constructed to serve as a basis and an exposition of logic—is more or less tacitly accepted by all the brahmanic systems: action is conceived as a kind of response by the subject to an external stimulus. Invariably the sequence is: knowledge → desire → inclination to act. There is no action that is not preceded by a desire, and the latter is never the desire to act, but desire for an object, for a precise result known to be good in itself. The knowledge which gives rise to the desire is often a perception; but this perception is of interest only inasmuch as it informs the subject of the present existence of an object within reach, which he knows in other ways to be good for him or useful to him (artha). Knowledge of the present object is inseparable from a whole halo of past experiences which gives it an index of value. Instinctive behaviour which does not seem to be preceded by either knowledge or desire (the first time a child sucks at its mother's breast, for example) is even accounted for in terms of supposed experiences from past lives. This simple structure explains sexual behaviour as well as action performed in the field of artha. But it is equally capable of accounting for actions governed by dharma which are intended to produce a desirable outcome.

The brahmanic conception of action is so well expressed in this way that it reappears, in an even more systematic form, applied by Mīmāṃsā to the analysis of dharmic conduct. Mīmāṃsā is the philosophical school which set out to draw up the rules of interpretation of the Vedic Revelation, and more specifically that part of the Revelation which deals with rites. But it really performed a work of philosophy in seeking—like Nyāya for logic—to make explicit the foundations of its hermeneutics. It starts out from the self-evident datum—it is more than a postulate—that all action is painful, since it presupposes effort and fatigue. Therefore no one would ever act if he were not convinced that by this action he would obtain a good which would significantly reward the effort expended. Let us pre-empt the misunderstanding that is likely to arise in view of the widespread prejudice that the Hindu is 'contemplative': Mīmāṃsā certainly does not draw from contemplation its conception of action as painful. The Greeks in any case taught us that contemplation is the highest form of action. But the philosophers of Mīmāṃsā did not believe in contemplation,

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knowledge, the pursuit of the Absolute. Up to a certain point (seventh or eight century AD?) they even refused the idea of liberation, and when they were obliged to integrate it, they still asserted that it was obtained through rites. Their conception of action as essentially painful is therefore even more remarkable. Action does not express man, it only reveals his desire, in the most egoistic sense of the term. Practically speaking, these ritualists weighted down the life of the 'twice-born' with a plethora of rites suited to every conceivable circumstance: there is the oblation for the birth of a son, the sacrifice to obtain cattle, a village, a kingdom . . . but most of these major sacrifices are aimed at securing heaven after death. The desire for this necessarily invisible result is indeed that which distinguishes man from animals. But it is neither the object nor the nature of the desire which distinguishes him, but the acceptance of an action aimed at a long-term result. However, the obligatory daily rites or those which must be performed on certain occasions (birth, marriage, death . . .) do not seem to lend themselves to such analysis of action: one does not perform them because one desires a precise result, given that they entail no result. But there is no conception of substitution: these obligatory rites are performed only because one fears misfortune in the event of abstention. Fear is the negative reverse side of desire and it can still be formulated in terms of desire: it can be said that a man acts with the desire to obtain something beneficial—*artha*—or to avoid something harmful—*anartha*. Once again, we oberve the strange overlapping of registers. We are in the midst of dharma, but it is still a question of artha. Dharma does not address a higher level of the human kind, but it is distinct from artha in that it deals with invisible objects or with actions whose efficacy is invisible, and for which the Revelation is required as a source of knowledge.

It is clearly no accident that desire is thus stripped bare, as it were, by the school of brahmanic thought that is most orthodox, but with an exclusively secular orthodoxy. Mīmāṃsā refused renunciation and would also refuse bhakti, and mention has already been made of the way in which it empties the Vedic gods of their reality in order to give full importance to the sacrificial rites. It is obviously a school of Brahmans (like all the Sanskrit philosophical schools), for whom desires and the rites intended to satisfy them highlight their priestly

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function. Possessing both knowledge of the rites and the monopoly of performance of them, they are the indispensable agents of the prosperity of this world. Perhaps, however, they would not have thought of systematizing their world view in this way if they had not had to contrast it with that of the renouncers and, even more, with that of the Brahmans who sought to integrate renunciation into their own philosophy. The ideal of humanity which they put forward—with entirely rational rigour and total intellectual probity, for they are talking about themselves—is ultimately somewhat impoverished, almost a caricature in its refusal of any transcendence. Man is the only being who interests them, but it is the man of their society, of high-caste brahmanic society, man as he exists in themselves and not as he ought to be or might be imagined. But by reducing the ritualistic religion of the higher castes to its essential form, they manifest it more clearly as the reverse of renunciation, as the pole of entire affirmation which is the counterpart of the pole of refusal.

The eternity of speech and the power of vision

If bhakti or the notion of a sovereign God—Īśvara—appears from time to time on the edge of their discussions, the great avowed adversary remains Buddhism, and especially the mystic Buddhism of Mahāyāna that was known to the early Mīmāṃsists. They saw it as the very culmination of renunciation, the point where renunciation really casts off its links with secular values by contesting even the validity of the Veda. Since the Buddhists claim to substitute for the Veda the word of the Buddha, it is necessary to establish the absolute truth of the brahmanic Revelation by setting it beyond all possibility of doubt, and to oppose it to the weakness of every human testimony. So we are brought back to the idea that the Veda (that is, the whole of the Revelation) is not only eternal but self-revealed: such a body of rites, placing the sorts of demands it does on people—and offering them results that are either distant or invisible (to the living human eye)—could only draw on itself for its authority. There is no man in this world who can claim a power of vision—i.e. of knowledge—superior to that of other men. Not even Manu: and for anyone who knows what this mythic law-maker represents in the eyes of an orthodox Brahman, such a declaration has to be taken seriously. This means, in particular, that even the

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wisest Brahman, the one whose learning carries most weight, has had no extraordinary power of knowledge. He owes his superiority solely to his deeper study of the Veda—the Veda which he received from his master like all other Brahmans. *A fortiori*, run-of-the-mill Brahmans have so special capacity for vision. They simply receive the eternal knowledge from their masters. If one asks how the Veda manifested itself in the first place, the answer is simple: the world has always existed and, since there has never been a beginning, there was never a moment when the Veda first manifested itself. It has always been passed on by word of mouth. This personal modesty and the claim of absolute authority for the Veda are aimed at all those who are credited with superhuman powers of vision thanks to which they are supposed to have 'seen' the invisible, and therefore 'composed' the Veda or some other revelation: first and foremost the Buddha, then the most powerful yogins, and finally Iśvara, the Lord, the god of Bhakti, whose respective devotees regard them as omniscient.

The refusal of omniscience even becomes a kind of touchstone of orthodoxy: the philosophers of Nyāya and Vaiseṣika, like those of classical Yoga, accept the possibility of omniscience for the original *ṛṣis* who 'saw' the Veda and transmitted it to men out of their goodness, for the yogins who acquired it through their ascetic exercises, and for Īśvara; all this has to be seen in relation to the universe of bhakti and no longer to the orthodox world view which has so far been described. On the other hand, the Vedānta of Śaṅkara takes its stand on Mīmāmsā in asserting the eternity and self-revelation of the Veda,[4] i.e. both of the Upaniṣads and of all the revealed texts which give knowledge of the Absolute. We find again here (see p. 26) the path of knowledge which was previously described as the most orthodox: the role of the guru is now grounded in doctrine. When, through the images and the formulae of the Revelation, the master teaches his disciple the identity of ātman and *Brahman*, he is not simply the extension, within the world of the renouncers, of the guru who teaches the Veda to the young *brahman*; he is the necessary intermediary, the organ of transmission of a knowledge of the Invisible *par excellence*, which man has no means of acquiring by himself. Śaṅkara's 'renouncer' has abandoned rites, but this is not sufficient to confer new powers on him. What he seeks is experimental knowledge of the Absolute,

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not intellectual knowledge;[5] and, by definition, that experience of an ineffable Absolute can only be beyond words. Yet it is the upaniṣadic Revelation transmitted by the guru which makes it possible to seek it in the right direction and attain it.

It is likely that Śaṅkara (seventh-eighth century?) represents a decisive moment in the renouncers' growing awareness of the demands of brahmanic orthodoxy, and that this awareness could only be achieved by following in the tracks of Mīmāṃsā. The self-revelation of the Veda is normally combined with the refusal to grant the yogins an extraordinary power of vision. However, living in a world in which bhakti is triumphant, Śaṅkara takes account of belief in a sovereign God, Īśvara, whom he makes a manifestation of Brahman at the level of *māyā*. Indeed, his non-dualism makes it relatively easy to integrate the existing religious currents, since everything that is not pure and simple *Brahman* is illusion—*māyā*—including Īśvara. This flexible orthodoxy is one of the major reasons for Śaṅkara's success up to the present day. There is not a Hindu to be found, Śaṅkarian or not, who has not learnt to distinguish the levels of reality, and who, inside a temple dedicated to a particular deity, will fail to explain to one, *ad nauseam*, that the deity worshipped in that place is but a manifestation of the supreme *Brahman*. But we shall have to return to this crucial point.

It will have been noted that the model for all knowledge is perception, particularly visual perception, of the objects present, the 'vision' of the omniscient yogin, and even the ultimate realization of the Absolute which the Śaṅkarian sannyāsin arrives at after having at great length ruminated upon the upaniṣadic teaching with the aid of his master. The knowledge which Veda gives of the invisible world of rites is itself curiously assimilated to a direct knowledge, i.e. a perception: the self-revealed Word in fact puts the hearer in immediate contact with the revealed objects. At the beginning of its exposition of logic, Nyāya recognizes that the summit of all knowledge is perception: having reached that point, thought rests, satisfied. There is never any question of intellectual understanding, inward knowledge of a thing or a being. This is one of the aspects which is logically linked to the anthropology of desire that Mīmāṃsā builds up: the desire to know—*jijñāsā*, another desiderative form—is never gratuitous, it always implies that some good is expected, not from knowledge, but from the object of knowledge. If

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a man does not seek to understand, that is because he does not think he needs to in order to possess: all that is useful is given, either in perception or in the the Revelation and the Tradition which completes it. And it is quite clear that the desire to know *Brahman* itself is no exception to this rule. Thus man knows essentially through his sensory organs, including his hearing, which gives him access to the revealed Word, completed by *manas*, the internal organ which also ensures the link between the external organs and the ātman. The ātman itself, which, as has already been observed, has no structure of its own since it will return to undifferentiated-ness in deliverance, plays so small a part in the process of knowledge (although it preserves the record of memories and karman) that some conceive it as pure consciousness (Vedānta), while others (Nyāya) regard it as unconscious by nature—particularly so, therefore, in the liberated state—and conscious by accident. Sāṅkhya complicates this schema somewhat, as we shall see, for reasons which have nothing to do with a more refined analysis of the activity of knowledge.

However, this structure of the cognitive apparatus is linked even more deeply to the orthodox anthropology, of which the primacy of desire is only one aspect: one has to remember what individual man is in brahmanic society. Taken as a member of his group, identified with the function he inherited at birth, and integrally related to the totality of the triple world through the 'debts' he has contracted by coming into the world, he is himself a person who has no 'inside'. He learns from his group what is expected of him and the ideal for him will be to conform to it. What then is to be learnt that is not already known by someone who will teach it to you? There is never a sense of progress, other than in the explanation of what has been said in the past and which already contained all that needed to be known. Therefore philosophical and religious literature is, for the most part, a literature of commentaries in scholastic form. But the consequences of this also resonate beyond the limits of philosophy. Regardless of the manner in which the earliest scientific discoveries (in medicine, astronomy and mathematics) were formulated—discoveries that were, to be sure, no more true or false than those of ancient Greece, whatever their comparative dates may have been—the mental and, more generally, the cultural conditions never seem to have coalesced in India in such a way as to

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give rise to a true spirit of research and investigation. It may be granted that the history of scientific ideas in the West has been partly a matter of serendipity. But the sense this may give us of the contingency and fragility of our successes cannot mask the fact that Greece bequeathed to our Middle Ages a richer notion of individual man than that of India:[6] Plato's republic distributes its three social functions by analogy with the structure of the individual man. Even if the philosophers of that republic only contemplate ideas which exist outside themselves, the fact remains that they are capable of contemplating them, that their minds are made for that. There is an 'inside' to the individual man which Christianity only deepens, universalizes and renders more precious. We shall shortly see, by contrast, what type of man Hinduism projected, not into the human city, but into the Absolute.

One can formulate very briefly what is missing in the brahmanic vision of man, from the standpoint of the most fundamental conceptions of the West. On the one hand, the concept of reason never appears. This is a concept that allows the individual, at the very least, to appropriate for himself the ideas of his milieu. But it can also give rise to projects as ambitious as that of Descartes: to start from scratch as a means of thinking more clearly, and to base one's thinking on an unassailable initial premise. The very notion of a concept has no equivalent in Sanskrit vocabulary. Correlatively, human conduct is never considered in the light of an individual moral conscience. But it is extremely dangerous to formulate negatively in this way that which makes the originality of India. It is immediately necessary to prevent the interpretations that the ambient prejudices would encourage. If, in particular, we could abandon once and for all the absurd idea that Hindu thought does not recognize the principle of non-contradiction and that its natural mysticism even revels in the identification of contraries. . . ! This misapprehension stems from the confusion of different orders of thought, although they also exist in our thinking, where we are able to keep them distinct. Brahmanic conceptual systems are probably never what we call 'philosophy', in the sense in which this is distinguished from theology, since they are all built up within the ambient religious beliefs, themselves regarded as universal self-evidences. Their theories of knowledge all give a central place to the revealed Word without which all thought would be crippled. This is

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indeed still the great affirmation of contemporary Hindu thinkers in the face of the presumptions of a western civilization that is perceived overall as atheistic. Human thought can only work on foundations which are given to it and which it has to accept.[7] But this does not imply either that Hindus have not been able to think rationally or that they have never handled concepts. Not only have they used the principle of non-contradiction—it is not clear how any thought could dispense with it—but they have constructed a universe of logical coherence which is almost too perfect, both in their mythology and in their philosophy, and a system of logic that is breathtaking in its subtlety. It is my aim to give a glimpse of the former in the whole of this essay, and I shall perhaps have succeeded if the reader is left with an impression of vertigo. As for the latter, it is forever inaccessible to the non-specialist because it requires an extremely technical and rigorous language, closely linked to the resources of Sanskrit and defying translation. Each supporting the other, they have developed in a totally self-enclosed universe of thought, with very little external influence and no possibility of internal renewal. To understand this, one would have to imagine a scholasticism that never opened onto a Renaissance or a Descartes—and this in spite of the powerful originality, down to recent times, of certain thinkers.

So when Hindu or Buddhist philosophers have juxtaposed contradictory formulae such as: 'It is being and non-being, it is neither being nor non-being'; they are not ignoring the principle of non-contradiction, as some westerners, whether in mockery or in ecstatic admiration, have naïvely supposed. On the contrary, they sought, by means of a scholarly use of this principle, which they diverted from its usual applications, to express an absolute reality that eluded, by its very nature, the structures of thought. The West too has known such paradoxical formulations, and no one has ever been tempted to accuse their authors of not understanding the principle of non-contradiction. It was understood that they were seeking to express an ineffable transcendence which ordinary human language could only betray. It would only be fair to credit Nāgārjuna or other 'mystical' philosophers of India with an analogous and perfectly conscious intention. In any case, the importance of the 'mystical' philosophy of India should not be exaggerated. One sometimes has the impression that, for westerners

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who take an interest in the country without making it a particular object of study, Indian philosophy begins and ends with the *Upaniṣad*s. In fact, at that point it has not yet begun: the *Upaniṣad*s simply lay down one of its revealed foundations. But it is true that, subsequently, it was possible to write volumes of subtle dialectic on the ineffability of *Brahman*. All the brahmanic systems were built up against one adversary or another, and each of them constituted itself as a coherent whole offering a complete panoply of arguments and counter-arguments, and this is as true of the systems which speak of knowledge of *Brahman*, such as Vedānta, as it is of the others.

Instantaneity

It is generally known that Buddhism, at least in best known schools, championed the instantaneousness of all things, including human thought. This is linked to its central affirmation, that there is no permanent principle in man. But it is less well known that brahmanism as a whole, which can readily be contrasted with Buddhism as a philosophy of fullness and permanence, conserved the notion of instantaneity, applying it solely to knowledge. There are no exceptions to this: Mīmāṃsā analyses empirical knowledge as a succession of discontinuous instants, Nyāya does the same, and the others follow. This instantaneity is complemented by the absence of simultaneity between two forms of knowledge. When we have the impression of seeing and smelling a jasmine flower at the same time, in reality we have two successive, very rapid perceptions, during which *manas* moves from one organ to another to put the ātman in contact with the sight of the jasmine and with its perception through smell. Manas is as mobile as the ātman is immobile and omnipresent. It is thus the intermediary between the absolute permanence of the ātman and the fleeting knowledge of things. It is difficult to understand this universal thesis of brahmanism without referring to the values it brings into play. Since all the systems accept it, it is not brahmanic orthodoxy which directly needs this instantaneity of individual knowledge in order to oppose it, for example, to the solidity of society or of things—which does however rather well serve the interests of a secular philosophy like Mīmāṃsā. But Mīmāṃsā also needs to prove the permanence of the ātman in order to justify the desire for heaven

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beyond the death and cremation of the body; in addition to the testimony of the *Upaniṣads*, it then invokes the knowledge we have of ourselves when we say 'I'. The reasoning is not very convincing if knowledge itself is instantaneous: why should this knowledge of 'I' always be knowledge of the same 'I'? No doubt for Mīmāṃsā the ātman partakes of the natural stability of things, which is now extended to infinity. An instantaneous knowledge of things does not preclude their permanence; and the identity of the subject asserts itself through the evanescent perception of the 'I'.

But one observes that instantaneity is limited to empirical knowledge. Yogins who attain omniscience of Īśvara have vision simultaneously and permanently (two features absent form ordinary knowledge) of all things and all beings of the past, present and future. For it is essentially this which constitutes omniscience, a universal perception limited neither by space nor by time. This means in particular that this perception is independent of the external organs and requires only the presence of manas, in contact on the one hand with the totality of objects and on the other with the ātman. We shall shortly have to return to the question of how yogic experience is conceived. It will suffice here to regard this perception as one of the forms of so-called mental perception—*mānasapratyakṣa*—in which the totality of the objects perceived has become internal to the yogin, just as the experience of pleasure or pain commonly is. Effectively, by refining its concepts, Nyāya was to work out a theory of the mānasapratyakṣas, three of which are called 'extraordinary contacts'. One of them is intended to explain why one has the impression of smelling the scent of sandalwood when one sees it at a distance. The smell of sandalwood, which is inseparable from sandalwood, is evoked at the sight of a piece of sandalwood, and one has a mental perception—a contact— of the smell accompanying the external visual perception. The second is of much broader epistemological import, since it is one of the solutions which India offers for grounding an inference (and here we recognize our old problem of the basis of induction). This is an 'extraordinary contact' that allows for a mental perception of every possible example of a particular genus, as a means of applying a general relationship to a particular case which comes under external scrutiny. Finally, the last of these is precisely *yogipratyakṣa*, the yogic perception which transcends the limits of ordinary

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perception prior even to the attainment of omniscience. The yogin is, for example, reputed to know his former lives and those of others. It is difficult to prove that Nyāya conceived the other forms of mānasapratyakṣa along the lines of yogic perception, but the latter was known before the others and also extends far beyond the school of logic. This is, regardless of the school it belongs to, the sole form of knowledge in which time stands still and space becomes boundless. It is also the one which represents the state of consciousness closest to the delivered state, although it is still part of empirical life. Mīmāṃsā, moreover, refuses both of them: it no more understands what is meant by a consciousness unadulterated by any object or an ātman that is no longer conscious (Nyāya) than it accepts yogic perception.

It is then very tempting to think that the idea of the instantaneity of empirical knowledge takes on its full meaning in the opposition that is thus established between the temporality, and therefore the essential limitation, of any consciousness engaged in the life of this world and the eternity of the pure consciousness which is ātman, or of the unconscious ātman. Would it even have been so strange for the ultra-orthodox thinkers of Mīmāṃsā to have purely and simply borrowed this idea in order to adapt it to suit both the needs of polemics and the demands of their own system? The history of the philosophical ideas of India is largely the history of the borrowings which the systems have made from each other in order the better to defend their own positions. But there is more than that involved: we initially posited that the values of liberation in India were only intelligible within their relationship of opposition to secular brahmanism, but it very quickly had to be added that the world of the sannyāsin had served as an example, or even as a fertilizing element, at the deepest level of the life of the secular Brahman. We have seen Mīmāṃsā being preoccupied with ahiṃsā, which orthodox thought nonetheless strove to keep outside the sphere of the sacrificial rites. This in fact leads us to suspect that there perhaps never has been a pure Mīmāṃsist, whose religion would have been entirely dominated by his system of ideas—a limit case system which, apart form the hermeneutics of the Vedic texts which it provides, was consciously constructed as the 'anti-renunciation' by borrowing weapons from its adversaries. It is not necessary to posit a system of Vedāntic or yogic type, entirely constituted at the

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conceptual level, and to imagine that Mīmāṃsā there found ready-made the idea of instantaneity. The latter is more likely, both in Mīmāṃsā and in the systems centred on renunciation, to have been one of the conceptual transpositions of a value-judgement by the renouncers on the empirical world. Who was the first to make this transposition? The history of the polemics between religious currents or currents of ideas might be able to decide the question for us, if only we knew enough about it.

Linked to the instantaneity of knowledge is another characteristic which gives rise to the same kind of reflexion on our part: the brahmanic texts, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta or others, repeat that knowledge is itself without form, and that it is the known object which lends it its form. This thesis is directly opposed to the 'idealist' Buddhist school of Vijñānavāda, for which knowledge constructs its objects, whose form is thus inseparable from knowledge and has no external reality. However, the importance taken by this idea of the formlessness of knowledge cannot be justified solely by the needs of polemics with Buddhism. It certainly has a more direct value in the constellation of brahmanic theses. In fact, in Mīmāṃsā, it serves to support the affirmation of the objective reality of things independently of all knowledge. But in Vedānta and in any system which seeks to safeguard the existence of an ātman independent of empirical life, it is on the contrary the formlessness of knowledge which is directly valorized: it is indeed in complete agreement with the notion of an ātman that is pure, totally unlimited consciousness, which is that of Vedānta. It is equally congruent with the idea of a *samādhi*—'concentration of the mind'—in which there remains no 'mental construction', the ultimate stage which the yogin attains. We thus find ourselves in the same situation as with the thesis of instantaneity: both the most orthodox Brahmans and the systems which were constituted around renunciation used the same idea to meet the respective—and sometimes contrary—needs of their systems. This idea certainly has a role to play in the polemics with Buddhism, but this is not its whole justification.

In particular one cannot avoid evoking the fifth material element, *ākāśa*, which the brahmanic philosophies, and more especially the Vaiśeṣika and Sāṅkhya systems, add to the four well-known elements—earth, water, fire and air—making it the material medium of sound.[8] But ākāśā, before entering this conceptual systematiza-

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tion, is empty space and, as such, in the *Upaniṣads*, it is the analogue of ātman inasmuch as it is omnipresent, unlimited and without internal structure. Once it became the material substrate of sound (where and when?), ākāśā kept its unstructured and, one might say, 'formless' character, whereas Vaiśeṣika develops a theory of the atomic structure of the other constitutent elements of matter. Owing to this peculiarity, which introduces a surprising asymmetry into the system, the ether remains the analogue of ātman and makes it possible to specify some of its properties. So it seems here too that the formlessness of knowledge was one of the conceptual transpositions of the opposition which the renouncers saw between ātman and the diversity of empirical knowledge. From the beginning it must have been linked to the negative value assigned to the multiplicity of names and forms: 'Just as, my son, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech, whereas only that which is called 'clay' is real; just as, my son, by one lump of metal all that is made of metal becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech, whereas only that which is called "metal" is real; just as, my son, by one pair of nail scissors all that is made of iron becomes known, the modification being only a name arising from speech, whereas only that which is called "iron" is real; so it is with the teaching on that (=Brahman)' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI.1.4–6). If one remained within brahmanism, corresponding to the objective unreality of names and forms was their accidental character within thought and the possibility for the latter of freeing itself from them. It will be noted that Uddālaka's teaching to his son, in the *Chāndogya*, states that the multiple forms have speech as their medium, and not thought, as Buddhism would assert.

So there is every likelihood that Mīmāṃsā again took up and used for its own purposes a notion which it derived from the thinking of the brahmanic renouncer. Furthermore it is clear on what, in its ritualistic speculations, it could have constructed a metaphysics and devised a language capable of entering into a relationship, albeit one of hostility, with the brahmanic or Buddhist renouncers. It is exactly as if it had accepted up to a point the gaze which the renouncers brought to bear on the secular world and the value-judgement they applied to it. To be sure, its religious universe was somewhat changed by this. However, we can also say that it did the

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same for the sannyāsin since, in the strict sense of the term, it is the Brahman alone who can become a sannyāsin. This he effects through a rite in which he renounces his householder status; and by this means he retains, in his life as a sannyāsin, the memory of his social origins. This give and take, which was sometimes effected at cross-purposes, and which we have seen occurring at the conceptual level between the two poles of brahmanic thought, was in fact fully played out on a religious level, where it provoked vast upheavals. Neither the world of the renouncers nor secular life remained unscathed, and what is called 'Hinduism' rather than 'brahmanism' emerged from the process. Once again renunciation played a decisive role through the new prospects it offered to men living in the world.

From renunciation to bhakti

Up to now, in fact, the debates we have followed took place almost entirely among and for the benefit of Brahmans, all the more so since the great Buddhist philosophers of the first centuries AD were Brahmans by birth. By contrast, the concepts of the puruṣārthas laid greater stress on the princes and indirectly, no doubt, on the lower castes, at least as regards kāma and artha. It had long been understood that the Brahman was above all the man of dharma, but now he was also claiming for himself a kind of monopoly over liberation and modifying his dharma in this direction.

However, renunciation, because it sought liberation outside society, could scarcely exhaust all its possibilities and its power of attraction in this special relationship with the Brahmans. It could not fail to be the carrier of a more universal expectation: the major *Upaniṣad*s present Kṣatriyas who, though 'offerers of sacrifice', nonetheless have the same preoccupations as their officiating Brahmans, and seek to know more about liberation from karman. Their very piety, however, forbids them to renounce their kingly duties which seem to condemn them to accumulate the worst sort of karman there can be. We shall indeed see that the first foundations of bhakti—since it is this which was to burst the framework of orthodoxy—are laid down in the epics which depict a turbulent society of princes and Brahmans who argue about war and salvation. But it would be simplistic to see the emergence of bhakti as essentially a reorganization of the prospects of salvation in favour

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first of the Kṣatriyas, and then the lower castes. The upheaval is much more radical.

To persuade oneself that renunciation was really felt to be universal in scope, one only has to turn to various passages in the great Vedāntic *Upaniṣads*—texts, in other words, which were to become the charter of the path of knowledge, the most orthodox of the forms of renunciation, that of the old-style sannyāsin. Assertions such as the following, applied to someone who has experienced ātman, have incalculable resonances for brahmanic ears: 'There, a father becomes a non-father, a mother becomes a non-mother; the worlds (to be conquered through sacrifice) are no longer worlds, the gods (beneficiaries of the sacrifice) become non-gods. . . . There, the thief becomes a non-thief, the murderer a non-murderer, the *Caṇḍāla* a non-*Caṇḍāla*, the *Paulkasa* a non-*Paulkasa*,[9] the ascetic a non-ascetic, the *tapasvin* a non-*tapasvin*.[10] He is followed neither by blessing nor by sin, for he has then passed beyond all the sorrows of the heart.' Śaṅkara, commenting on this passage from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV.3.22), more faithful to the spirit of renunciation than to the orthodoxy which he has to integrate, allows no ambiguity to persist. Each term denied is explained by its relationship to karman: the knower of ātman, being freed from all karman, is no longer that which he was before: the father-son relation no longer exists, nor does the mother-son relation. One notes in passing that woman seems here to have access to liberation, i.e. to an individual destiny which secular conceptions of life hereafter did not grant her. Women are indeed not absent from the Upaniṣadic literature, and it is the same *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* which gives us the very beautiful dialogue between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī (II.4). The next terms which are denied designate objective aspects of the universe of sacrifice: the spheres—*lokas*—that are won through rites, the gods to whom offerings are made. Thus the thief, the Caṇḍāla, etc., might be taken for examples of impure beings who are no longer impure for the renouncer. But Śaṅkara's reading is different, and his view, as the guru of the 'twice-born', has to be taken seriously: a Caṇḍāla who knows ātman is no longer a Caṇḍāla. Thus impurity no longer exists in renunciation, and this ought immediately to imply that *anyone* can become a sannyāsin. But the contradiction is flagrant, since the path of knowledge, as it

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was institutionalized, would require that one have access to the Upaniṣadic Revelation, from which a Caṇḍāla is forever excluded. This teaching might therefore have remained purely theoretical if another path had not been offered to those whom the orthodoxy would leave in outer darkness. From this standpoint, it is particularly interesting to note that Śaṅkara, following the *Upaniṣad*, regards the various ascetic exercises as reduced to insignificance by access to knowledge: he does not condemn them, but the way in which he places the śramaṇas and the tapasvins in the same series as the thief and the Caṇḍāla suggests that the suffering they undertake is not what brings them to knowledge (the Buddha said nothing different). On the other hand, the word *yoga* is never used.

This is not all, and we return, after a detour, to the question from which we started: from whence does Bhīma, in the *Mahābhārata*, get the insight that leads him to see desire at the basis of all human activity, of every stage of life? In fact—since it is probably more convincing to remain with what subsequently constituted the most orthodox reference of renunciation—the same *Upaniṣad*, which is very clearly earlier than the classical systematization of the goals of man, readily uses the language of kāma to refer to the love of ātman. In particular this is what Yājñavalkya does when instructing the worried Maitreyī (II.4.5), and it is surely no accident that the term *kāma* is endlessly used in a speech addressed to a woman: 'It is not for the love—*kāma*—of the husband that the husband is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the husband is dear. It is not for the love of the wife that the wife is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the wife is dear. It is not for the love of sons that sons are dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that sons are dear. It is not for the love of wealth that wealth is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that wealth is dear. It is not for the love of the *Brahman* that the *Brahman* is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the *Brahman* is dear. It is not for the love of the *Kṣatra* that the *Kṣatra* is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the *Kṣatra* is dear. It is not for the love of the worlds—the *lokas*—that the worlds are dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the worlds are dear. It is not for the love of the gods that the gods are dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the gods are dear. It is not for the love of beings—*bhūtas*—that beings are dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that beings are dear. It is not for the love of the

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universe—*sarvam*—that the universe is dear, but it is for the love of the ātman that the universe is dear. Indeed, it is the ātman that must be seen, that must be heard, that must be thought upon, that must be concentrated upon, O Maitreyī, since it is by the vision of, the hearing of, the contemplation of and the knowledge of the ātman that all this is known.'[11] Yājñavalkya, on the point of abandoning his two wives in order to go and live in the forest as a hermit, is trying to explain to one of them that shining through the desire or love for the things and beings of this transient world—one notes in passing the key terms of 'worldly' language—is a more essential love for which it is worth leaving everything. Later on, however, when polemics have refined the conceptual tools (more than the conceptions themselves), philosophers hesitate to use the term *kāma* to designate the desire for liberation or the love of ātman. They emphasize, in any case, the uniqueness of this desire, its radical difference from earthly desires, inasmuch as it entails no karman. So they cannot agree with Bhīma in his generalization; yet Bhīma was drawing on the best sources in his apologia for kāma, and the reflexion on desire could only come from those who had distanced themselves from it, even if they no longer recognized their work in the words of Vāyu's son.

On this point, much more than on philosophical theses such the instantaneity or the lack of form of knowledge, it is quite clear that the common problematic of the sannyāsin and the man in the world had to develop into a total opposition. Bhīma glorifies kāma, whereas his brother Yudhiṣṭhira (in the same chapter of the *Mahābhārata*) opposes to it mokṣa, which sweeps away all the other puruṣārthas. The hierarchy of the four goals of man could only satisfy the man in the world, determined to keep mokṣa on the horizon, but also to pursue worldly ends as fully as possible. The fact that, metaphysically, these have only a relative value does not prevent them from being good and desirable. The renouncer, by contrast, when he turns back to look at the world, sees it entirely governed by desire, from which he has to liberate himself. We have seen (see p. 38) how, again in the same *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*,[12] kāma is linked to the ego—*ahamkāra*—and how it is through kāma that the world of the relative, of metaphysical ignorance, appears. In the sannyāsin's perspective, kāma is the all-encompassing value in this world, whereas for the orthodox

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Brahman, it is dharma alone that can fulfil this role. We thus arrive at the paradox whereby the cow, the symbol of the Brahman's sacrificial power, is most often called Kāmadhenu, 'she from whom one milks all that one desires'. Thus there emerges another level of kāma—where it is no longer solely erotic desire but desire in all its forms—which re-establishes the essential discontinuity between mokṣa and the other ends of man. Kāma is what has to be renounced in order to break free from the bonds of karman and of transmigration.

Whereas the starting-point of the sannyāsin's speculations was karman, the analysis he conducted, parallel to that of the Brahman, on human actions and goals, has shifted the focus of interest. It is this notion of kāma—in the all-encompassing sense which the renouncer attributes to it—together with the whole constellation of associated ideas, which comes to constitute a golden thread that runs through all speculations about true universal salvation. Bhakti would seek a solution in the abolition of kāma in the very heart of man's ordinary activity. In other words, it would seek to imbue secular life with the sannyāsin's ideal. By contrast, what has been referred to under the excessively vague term of tantrism was to be the attempt to place kāma (in all senses of the word) and the associated values at the service of liberation.

The universe of bhakti

In the epics, in the *Purāṇa*s (accounts of the origins)[13], in an abundant devotional and hagiographic literature in Sanskrit and in all the great modern languages of India, there was expressed and developed, over the centuries, in its different aspects, what is generally known as Hinduism. In fact, bhakti, the religion of devotion which has covered India with its most beautiful temples, is only one of the major currents of Hinduism, but one can no more understand the structures of sectarian Vedānta (Rāmānuja, Madhva . . .), or the tantric sects, than those of classical Sāṅkhya, without starting from the doctrinal edifice which it has built up in an essentially mythical language.

Because this religion of devotion is completely absent from what are regarded as the most ancient texts of the Vedic Revelation, and presupposes, in particular, a conception of deity of which the Vedic

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rites offer no example, there is a tendency to seek its origin outside Vedic circles, or more precisely to hypothesize about the existence of a religion contemporary with the Vedic literature, of which no trace remains. Its popular character might explain the total silence of the Veda on the subject. This theory appears entirely plausible, until we realize that it implies, of itself, a complete reconstruction of bhakti as we know it. Such a reconstruction would either be wholly unconvincing or would even be ruled out by textual data as well as by our present knowledge of brahmanic socio-religious concepts. It would in fact attempt to view bhakti as a religion of more or less unbridled emotions, a religion whose true colours do not appear until such texts as the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* or, more exactly, until the vernacular literature. This would further oblige us to characterize the epics and the more 'intellectual' *Purāṇa*s as the first imperfect articulations of a bhakti of lower-caste origins, which slowly pushed its way into upper-caste circles.

As has already been said, there is no question of denying that India saw religious forms other than brahmanism, both before and after the coming of the 'Aryans'. Were these popular learned forms which the conqueror condemned to inferiority? Local or even tribal cults, rather than a unified set of beliefs? We are here in the area of pure conjecture, and it is pointless to linger in it. Two things seem clear: firstly, it would be very difficult to understand how such a hierarchical society, in which the norms always come from above, could have yielded to pressure from below to the extent of allowing itself to be won over to a reputedly inferior religious form. On the contrary, the only intelligible process would be one in which the conquerors accept the religious forms which they find on their arrival, integrating them into their own structures, but in a subordinate place. We have already seen such a process of hierarchization and envelopment at work in the reciprocal integration of renunciation and secular religion, and it also applied in other areas. Historically, the conquests of the great sovereigns did not, in general, lead to the substitution of one power for another, but to a subordination of the vanquished to the victor—which prepared the ground for a possible reversal of the situation, always theoretically conceivable since this took place in the limited domain of artha. But reversal is no longer possible when it is a question of imposing socio-religious norms which structure the whole of society. The

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superior has to remain the superior, but his hierarchical vision precisely enables him to integrate almost anything with a minimal change in structure. This can be proposed as a principle of functioning and no doubt as a model of all historical change within Indian society. On the other hand, there are no grounds for supposing a vanquished-victor relationship comparable to what happened between Greece and Rome. Brahmanism has never admired anything that was alien to it. In particular one cannot invoke against this what happened in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, under the domination of the Muslim emperors, since by then bhakti was already solidly implanted in India and it was bhakti which made possible the osmosis between Muslim and Hindu mysticism.[14]

Furthermore—and this is the second point we can take as given—when we honestly attempt to accept and understand the phenomenon of bhakti as a whole, together with the epics and *Purāṇas* that serve as its basic doctrinal texts, we realize that its structures are unintelligible so long as they are cut off from Vedic Revelation. This is not to say that these structures developed out of it in a direct linear fashion; and in this sense it is still possible for us to say that the Vedas knew nothing of bhakti. But bhakti was constituted by a re-reading of the Revelation which gave birth to a mythic and ritual universe of very great complexity, even if for the moment one only takes account of the pan-Indian and not the sectarian structures. It is even possible to be more specific: the data of the Revelation have not all been reworked with the same care and consistency. There is no doubt that the *Yajurveda*[15] was particularly at the centre of the speculations of bhakti, both in its ritualistic part and in its *Upaniṣads*, and this cannot be a pure accident: the *Yajurveda* is the Veda of the *adhvaryu*, the priest who, in the sacrifice, is charged with all the ritual manipulations, the actor *par excellence*, whose every gesture must receive a symbolic interpretation. This will be one of the threads to guide us through the labyrinth of bhakti.

If it is true that the structures of bhakti were thus the work of Brahmans—this being the direct implication of its essential relationship to Vedic Revelation—and that they were, as such, normative for all of Hinduism, then we should expect to find them throughout Hindu India and at every level, from the high-caste

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temples to the humblest of shrines, the unhewn stones one finds at the base of trees. And this is exactly the case. It is clear that in this impressive flowering of temples and holy places—which can be systematically recorded only on the scale of a local land registry—there must be shrines of all origins. But bhakti has so well integrated all these elements that it would be thoroughly unsound to seek to distinguish what is Aryan or indigenous or Dravidian, or what is pan-Indian or local or 'popular'. For my part, I know of no so-called 'local' cult which does not contain the general beliefs of bhakti. At the same time, it naturally has to be recognized that the generality of the beliefs allows a multiplicity of different levels which betray greater or lesser remoteness from the apex of the social pyramid. But we thereby simply rediscover the hierarchical structure of Hindu society. This multi-tiered structuring of levels translates particularly into the most widely varying transformations of the classic myths,[16] myths which have yet to find their Lévi-Strauss: the language and the story are often barely recognizable if the intermediate links in the transformation are missing; but on the other hand, under the names of different characters one finds some remarkably stable mythic structures. As for the values at stake, they become degraded without ever entirely disappearing, for one remains within the same cultural unity and the same religion. In the rites, the major division runs between vegetable offerings and animal sacrifices but precisely that which might be expected to bring out an insuperable duality within Hinduism between high-caste and low-caste deities only serves to manifest its unity, which is fundamental as that of society. Vegetarian gods and carnivorous gods associated—and duly set in a hierarchy—in the temples and cults. In the process, it is clear that local elements, and even historical events or characters, have been integrated, but that they become just as quickly unrecognizable. The 'learned' Brahman reacts to this situation by following one of two strategies. He either balks at recognizing his heritage when it is patently his own; or he finds a subtle brahmanic reinterpretation of what are apparently the most far-fetched of popular beliefs.

God as yogin and creator

The appearance of Viṣṇu and Śiva as major gods of bhakti cannot be entirely fortuitous, since the two *Upaniṣads* which constitute the

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revealed foundation of the yogic path to salvation call the ultimate goal of the yogic ascension in one case Viṣṇu and in the other Śiva (see p. 28). These deities of the yogin reappear in bhakti, each being conceived not only as the culmination of the yogic experience and of the movement towards liberation—or, in mythic language, as the site of liberation—but also as supreme Yogins. This does not occur, however, without a radical shift in perspectives, and it is their broad outlines that we must analyse if we are to understand what has taken place.[17] It is the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (3.10–11 and, with a variant reading, 6.7–8) that supplies the initial categories. The yogin progressively withdraws from the senses and their objects, and the manas—and then from other levels of being (or consciousness?) whose correspondences in the realm of yogic experience are difficult to determine. However, beyond a certain level, the one called *mahān ātmā*—'the great ātman'—it is certain that 'perception' is no longer limited to the body but extends to the whole of being. The omniscience attributed to the yogin no doubt corresponds to this level of experience, but this is not the ultimate level, the one towards which yogic endeavour strives. Beyond it is a level called 'the Undifferentiated' or 'the Non-distinct'—*avyakta*—and finally, beyond this, the supreme Puruṣa, Viṣṇu, in which the yogin is absorbed. This is indeed a yogic process culminating in samādhi, total concentration, and not in bodily death, since the *Kaṭha* adds that one has to attain total immobility of thought, that this is the supreme path. It then offers a definition of yoga which was to go far (6.11): 'Yoga is considered to be this maintenance of the immobility of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted, because yoga is appearance and disappearance.' Coming after the enumeration of the stages of the ascent to Puruṣa—who, we are told elsewhere, is inside the heart—this verse can only mean one thing: yoga takes the subject through phases in which external and internal objects disappear in order that the Puruṣa may appear, and opposite phases in which the subject returns to an ordinary level of experience. A yogin who has gone into a definitive samādhi is dead: indeed this is the way his death is usually expressed. So yoga is normally conceived as an oscillation of the levels of consciousness which range from ordinary experience to the ultimate experience of fusion with the Absolute. Compared with the definition of the *Yogasūtra* (the basic text of the classical system of Yoga)—'Yoga is

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the stopping of all the movements of thought'—the formula of the *Katha* is more dynamic and more complete. It takes account of the processes as well as of the result that is aimed at.

First cosmogony Moving now to the cosmogony presented by the main *Purāṇas*, we have the surprise of finding these stages of yogic experience transformed into successive planes of manifestation of the cosmos, to form together the initial phase of the cosmogony, which we shall call the 'first cosmogony'. Thus the stages of an individual ascent have become the stages of a progressive descent of the supreme Puruṣa into the cosmos: the Puruṣa has become the yogin, and the process of creation is assimilated to the yogin's return from samādhi to ordinary experience. There are, however, two important differences to be noted in this transposition: the Puruṣa is no longer, as in the *Upaniṣad*, set in a series with the other planes. It is no longer simply the final stage in the ascension, or the starting point, of the cosmic manifestation. Rather, it is the immutable principle, spiritual and transcendent, which remains so in a certain sense even as it gives a primary impulse to the *avyakta*, the 'Unmanifest', through its yoga. The *avyakta* is also called *pradhāna*, 'primary ground', and *prakṛti*, 'primordial form'; henceforth, we shall refer to this either as 'original Nature' or as 'Nature', according to the stage of manifestation in question. This designation will serve both to highlight the distinction between the evolutionary principle and the immutable Puruṣa, and to point out the fact that the former would be unconsciousness were it not for the light that it borrows from the pure Consciousness of the Puruṣa, which is Light. The Puruṣa thus involves itself in each of its phases without ceasing to be the great Yogin. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* seemed resolutely monistic (but not 'illusionistic', like Śaṅkarian Vedānta); the *Purāṇas* are not, but nor are they completely dualistic: God is and is not his creation, God manifests himself but remains the 'beyond' of all manifestation; or again, in more psychological terms, God takes an interest in his creation while remaining indifferent. But this is precisely what the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches through the words of Kṛṣṇa (IX.4): 'All of this world is pervaded by my unmanifest form. All beings dwell in me, but I do not dwell in them'; 'I am dear above all else to him who has knowledge, and he is dear to me' (VII. 17b); but also (IX.29): 'I am alike towards all

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beings. There is none who is hateful or dear to me. But those who worship (*bhaj*—literally, take part in) me with devotion (*bhakti*), they are in me and I am in them.'

If anyone is surprised by the contradiction, they may reflect that our Western theologians expended great efforts in explaining that God had no need of humankind, although he took the trouble to create it and save it. The gratuitous character of the creation in India nonetheless introduces maximum tension between the two aspects of deity, inasmuch as the yogin, the image of its supreme form, can have no attachment of any sort for the world he has left, and it becomes difficult to conceive of a creation out of love. However, to this too Hinduism has sought an answer within the terms of its system of problems: the human yogin, having reached a certain degree of mystic experience, precisely the one at which he has moved beyond the bounds of his empirical individuality, seems to feel a strong sense of pity or compassion—*kāruṇya*—for all the beings which are still held in the bonds of Ignorance (which, it is scarcely necessary to point out, is reminiscent of the compassion which Buddhists ascribe to the *bodhisattva*). It is also this sentiment which Hindus attribute to God, sometimes to account for the creation, sometimes to explain an end of the world—since the latter is obviously implied in the cosmic and divine transposition of the two phases of yoga. It is in order to save his creatures—or to enable them to attain liberation—that God emits the worlds, and it is also in order to save them that he reabsorbs them into himself. Arjuna's 'awful' vision of Kṛṣṇa in Chapter XI of the *Bhagavad Gītā* has no other meaning: as the yogin makes the external world disappear from his consciousness so to plunge ever deeper into himself until he reaches the essential core, so the Puruṣa (here Kṛṣṇa, which is the form Viṣṇu takes in the *Mahābhārata*) reabsorbs his creatures into himself so as to commune with himself, but this movement is liberation for the creatures since they are thus united with the Puruṣa.[18]

However, a second difference appears in the transposition of individual yoga into divine yoga, which only accentuates the quite deliberate intentions behind this work. While the *Purāṇas* identify two of the higher stages of the *Upaniṣad*, they add a new one which does not figure in the *Kaṭha* but whose significance has already become apparent to us—*ahamkāra*, the function of the ego. And

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they add it exactly where one might expect, just below *mahān ātmā* (which becomes *mahān* or *mahat* in the *Purāṇas*),[19] in the progressive manifestation of the cosmos, in other words at the moment when the Puruṣa constitutes itself as the cosmic ego. Whereas the term *ahaṃkāra* seems to occur for the first time in the *Chāndogya Upanisad* (VII.25.1), one of the great Vedāntic *Upaniṣads*, and then later in the *Śvetāśvatara* (V.8), it is essentially in the *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (I.4.10 and 17; see p. 38) that its mythic explanation appears in a recognizable form: 'In the beginning, the *Brahman* alone was here. It knew itself—*ātman*—only as: "I—*aham*—am *Brahman*". From this, it became everything. . . . In the beginning, the ātman alone was here. He was alone, he desired—*akāmayata*: "Would that I had a wife, would that I might engender (a son); would that I had wealth, that I might perform the rites." These are all the objects of desire—*kāma*.' To say 'I' and to desire that something be 'mine' are inseparable notions. The world of ego is also that of desire, and therefore of the metaphysical Ignorance which turns its back on liberation.

This introduction of a Vedāntic mythic theme—presented from the first as a cosmogony—into the yogic schema has numerous implications. Perhaps this is the moment to point out that the *Kaṭha Upanisad* and the *Śvetāśvatara* belong to the *Black Yajurveda*, whereas the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* belongs to the *White Yajurveda*. What we have distinguished as two paths to salvation (pp. 25ff.) is thus first formulated within the same mythico-ritual whole. And the two routes to salvation might be expected to be integrated into a single structure. The cosmic transposition of the individual yogic process may have been helped by the cosmogonic value attributed to the ego of *Brahman*. Moreover, the very importance which this ego and its desire take on in the creation explains why the insertion of ahaṃkāra into the *Kaṭha* schema introduces a critical point into the process of manifestation. It is the ego, in fact, that is the starting-point for cosmic manifestation, which follows two parallel lines of development (these are absent from the *Kaṭha*, in which the progression is linear). One line consists of the sense organs and the organs of activity (hand, foot, etc.), together with manas; the other is made up of the five sensorial properties and the corresponding material elements (see note 8). Ahaṃkāra, precisely inasmuch as it is the starting point of the components of the empirical world, no

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longer has a single, simple texture. It has three different aspects or *guṇas*:[20] the purest and most luminous, the most transparent to the light of Puruṣa is *sattva* (literally, the abstract cognate of *sat*, 'being'; it is therefore 'the fact of being' or 'the sum of all beings'); by contrast, the heaviest and darkest, the most unconscious, is *tamas* ('darkness'). Both of these would forever remain inert, one through excess of knowledge, the other for lack of it, if there were not, interposed between them, *rajas* (literally, 'dust', probably that which obscures the light refracted in sattva), the active element *par excellence*, which predominates in particular in mankind. The sattva and the rajas of ahaṃkāra combine to produce the organs of sense and action, while tamas and rajas give rise to the sensorial qualities and the elements (starting with sound and ākāśa). The reversal of the yogic process in the cosmogonic schema now takes on its full significance: the authors of the Purāṇic cosmogony (for there is only one, despite the multiplicity of texts) seek to explain the world in terms of the renouncer's vision of it. But, not being renouncers themselves, they obviously tend to valorize ahaṃkāra in the work of creation—even if this means seeing it as the source of metaphysical ignorance and condemning it in practical life. In one way or another, one has to return to the world one knows, where one lives and is at the centre. There is seemingly a wilful misunderstanding in turning the divine yoga towards the world; but in reality there is neither misunderstanding nor bad faith, since, as we shall see, the same tension between yoga and the world is introduced at the same time into human action.

Viṣṇu and Śiva While it is thus fairly clear how the notion of a sovereign God came to be constituted, we still have to account for the proper name given to this God—sometimes Viṣṇu, sometimes Śiva. The *Purāṇas* are sometimes divided into Śaivite *Purāṇas* and Vaiṣṇavite *Purāṇas*, according to the name they give to the supreme deity. They may differ in content and composition as much as one wants, but the same could be said of the Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite *Purāṇas* among themselves; the structure of the total cosmogony (including, therefore, the second phase, which we still have to examine), that of the cosmology, the different levels of manifestation of deity, and the organization of the cosmic periods, remain identical. One must therefore hesitate to speak of the main *Purāṇas*

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as sectarian, for the sects in the strict sense would not leave this schema intact. Each one modified, or rather multiplied, the levels of being and of its manifestation, not to mention the specific myths and philosophical elaborations which conceptually specify their mythologies. The main *Purāṇas* build up a conceptual universe which is fundamentally one and the same, whereas each sect was to construct its own closed world which aspires to be defined against those of the other. Moreover—but this is also true of the sects—the choice of either Viṣṇu or Śiva as supreme God does not mean that the other is not present at a lower level.

Viṣṇu and Śiva, needless to say, are present in the Vedic Revelation, even before the yogic *Upaniṣad*s in which they have already become supreme deities. Apparently they do not have a prime role in the ritual and mythology of the *Brāhmaṇas*, and it is certain that at this level one could not foresee their subsequent promotion. But when we look more closely, aided by what we know of subsequent events, we observe that there they occupy key positions with respect to Vedic sacrifice. While Viṣṇu is frequently identified with the sacrifice, and represents (perhaps even etymologically) the scope of the beneficent effects of the sacrifice, Śiva by contrast—under the name he then bears, Rudra ('the Terrible', whereas Śiva means 'benevolent') or Paśupati ('master of the cattle', but more probably 'of the sacrificial victims', since *paśu* means both)—personifies the impure and dangerous aspects of the sacrifice: it is he who receives the part of the victim damaged by the slaughter, which is handled in such a way as to avoid contaminating the other pieces of the victim. This opposition between the two gods is clearly so fundamental only because sacrifice is the essential ritual act, and therefore one of the poles (renunciation being the other) of brahmanic speculations, to which one always has to return in order to understand the subsequent transformations. Because Viṣṇu is the sacrifice and is thus intrinsically linked to the prosperity and splendour (*śrī* or *lakṣmī*) of a reign, he is at the heart of all organized social life. There he is the deity which represents the union of the two higher varṇas. So even when the yogin calls the supreme Puruṣa 'Viṣṇu' and when bhakti may thus make him a yogin, Viṣṇu retains his link with brahmanic orthodoxy and in his temples he has a royal air emphasized by the tiara he wears. By contrast, the Rudra of the *Brāhmaṇas* can only remain outside

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human space. He is the 'forest-dweller' or the 'mountain-dweller' like the renouncer, which predestines him to become a yogin and a renouncer in a much more radical sense than Viṣṇu. It is the ascetic's topknot that naturally befits him when he is depicted in his human form. Bhakti registers these oppositions and would draw from them endless implications and myths. So on this point, that of the choice between the two deities, bhakti merely reworked the data provided by the Revelation, preserving their original meaning within a larger whole.

Second cosmogony The first cosmogony which so far has been discussed, and which only implements categories derived from the renouncers, leads to the constitution of a cosmic egg, and not yet the 'triple world' with which we are familiar. The cosmogonic theme of the egg is not specifically Hindu. In India itself, it is already found in the revealed texts, the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*, where it generally constitutes a starting point rather than an end point. Here, however, the egg which appears is not just any cosmogonic egg, since it is called 'the egg of Brahmā'. A familiar figure reappears. More precisely, *Brahman* (neutral) has become a divine personage, a level of divine manifestation. It will be recalled (see pp. 17–25) that *Brahman* became the name of the Absolute only because it also designated Vedic knowledge and its efficacy, i.e. the totality of the Brahman's function, centred on sacrifice. Here, it is both these levels at once, but the Absolute which it represents is in any case relativized with respect to the great Yogin. Its appearance within the cosmic egg clearly indicates the resurgence of the brahmanic world within the universe of bhakti.

In effect, it is this which the second phase of the cosmogonic narrative, or 'second cosmogony', portrays. There is never any narrative linkage between this and the first cosmogony; and the second cosmogony seems to be self-sufficient. The egg no longer plays any role here; we again find Brahmā 'wishing to create' (*sisṛkṣu*, yet another desiderative form). So it is the very same kāma which, yet again, appears at the origin of the creative process, just as it did in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (see p. 38). Here, Brahmā turns himself into a boar in order to bring back the Earth to the surface of the ocean which had covered it in a previous flood.[21]

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While we cannot give a step-by-step summary of the narrative here, we will highlight those points which give the most meaning to the whole. First of all, the boar (a cosmogonic motif borrowed from the *Saṃhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas* of the *Black* and *White Yajurveda*) is identified, in every *Purāṇa* in which this account occurs, with the Sacrifice. Sacrifice is thus the creative principle which presides over the re-establishment and ordering of the 'triple world', the fate of the earth always being bound up with the fate of heaven and the infernal regions. When Brahmā has thus retrieved the earth from the sea-bed, he starts by creating Ignorance. One might have rather expected the sequence Ignorance-Sacrifice, since we have been taught that knowledge implies the abandonment of sacrifices; only metaphysical Ignorance could explain the practice of sacrificial rites—*karman*. This reversal seems to indicate a new upgrading of sacrifice which will enable it to continue when the veil of Ignorance has been lifted. But, at the same time, the reappearance of Ignorance shows clearly that the prospect of liberation has not been lost sight of. This is confirmed by Brahmā's creation of man, the only one of his creatures who satisfies him because, spurred by pain, he seeks liberation. This results from the high proportion of rajas in man, which impels him to action. Here too one notices a curious reversal of ideas, whereby men are made fit for liberation by their capacity to act, whereas previously the renouncer was he who abandoned all 'action'. All this will become clearer when we come to examine the anthropological implications of this new theology.

Furthermore, the second cosmogony is linked to a specific level of deity. At the highest level, it was a yogin, and the two phases of its yoga accounted for the emission and reabsorption of the world. Now it has to preside over the world of sacrifice. It is the deity which takes the form of Brahmā in order to create; normally it is then predominantly 'rājasic', as always when action is involved. But when the world is created, it is again the deity which keeps it in existence by assuming the form of Viṣṇu. This is the phase in which the regular performance of sacrifices enables the world to continue in existence; it is therefore natural that Viṣṇu—who is sacrifice—should be its protecting deity. Perhaps it is less obvious that, in this function, he should be 'sāttvic', since sattva predisposes towards inaction. But sattva was inactive only insofar as knowledge led to

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inaction, and its first characteristic is that it is transparent to the Light shed by Puruṣa. From now on, the Light seems to accept the sacrifice.[22] Finally, since the process of evolution and involution is perpetually repeated, the supreme deity has a third form at this same level of manifestation, which presides this time over the destruction of the world. It is of course Rudra the 'tāmasic' who incarnates this third aspect which brings on the cosmic night. These three forms taken by the Absolute—not concomitant in their operation but of the same level of being and indissociable—have been recognized as what is called the Trimūrti ('triple form') or, to put it in more Christian terms, the Trinity. The fact is that, despite the few unfortunate attempts made to connect them, there is little in common between this three-fold divine manifestation and the Christian Trinity. The Trimūrti too appears with the same constancy in all the *Purāṇas*, whatever the name given to the supreme form of deity. In other words, either Viṣṇu or Śiva may be found at both levels, but not Brahmā, who only intervenes at the level of the Trimūrti. Brahmā effectively never presents himself as the great Yogin and, correspondingly, is not the God of bhakti. Rather than wonder at the extreme rarity of his temples in India, one should wonder how there can be any at all.

Cyclic time

In ancient Western thinking, the idea of cyclic time seems to have been associated with the idea of a cosmology governed by the movement of the stars. Astronomy is clearly not absent from Indian speculations, which need fairly precise data for the performance of the rites: it is even part of the ancillary sciences of the Veda, along with grammar, metrics and the detailed description of ritual acts. The annual cycle of the seasons and the feasts which punctuate them also favours a conception of time which always returns identical to itself. However, the model on which Hinduism constructs its cosmic periods owes very little to astronomy, apart from the distinction between days and nights and the choice of the year as one of the units of time. Furthermore, the temporal divisions are first presented in their totality in the context of the Purāṇic cosmogony, a fact which would lead one to associate them with the conceptual framework of bhakti. Indeed, it would be unintelligible if it were not linked to the idea that the creation and reabsorption of

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the world are endlessly repeated as the phases of the yoga of the eternal Puruṣa. But it can also be seen at the same time that further complications have to be brought into the structure of cosmic periods in order to account for the two quite distinct stages of the genesis of the world and of the levels of manifestation of divinity.

Thus, the period between the start of a first cosmogony and a total reabsorption into the Puruṣa—the cosmic and divine transposition of the twofold phase of yoga—is but an instant of the supreme Puruṣa, but this instant measures a life of Brahmā. Since the length of an ideal individual human life is a hundred human years, the life of Brahmā is a hundred of Brahmā's years. But one of Brahmā's years is itself made up of three hundred and sixty-five of Brahmā's days or *kalpas*. A kalpa measures the period between a second cosmogony and the symmetrical reabsorption (see p. 100). i.e. the period dominated by the manifestation of the divinity at the level of the Trimūrti. Kalpa—from the root *klp*, to be adjusted—is also the noun which designates a set of texts describing domestic ritual and the rules of dharma. If Brahmā, waking at the end of a night, creates the world of sacrifice, the day which is thus initiated is fairly logically called kalpa, whereas the night, corresponding to a cosmic reabsorption of equal length but during which nothing happens, is never called kalpa. The life of Brahmā, which thus contains one hundred times three hundred and sixty-five kalpas, constitutes a *mahākalpa* or 'great kalpa', as opposed to the great reabsorption of equal length. The life of Brahmā is the cosmic period dominated by ritual activity but provoked by the act of yoga of the supreme Puruṣa.

The perpetual return of the cosmos is thus in fact the perpetual transmigration of the deity, which has manifested itself to the extent of constituting itself as a cosmic ego, endowed with the desire to act, to say 'I' and 'mine'. Thus, in the interlocking of the great periods of time of the universe, we find a mythic aspect correlative with the double cosmogony. Brahmā does indeed play the active—rājasic—role transposed from the myth of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. There is creation only because the deity constitutes itself as (to use an oxymoron) a cosmic individual. The supreme Puruṣa is the Yogin whom no act can sully or bind. He is *par excellence* the Liberated One, who should therefore, for all eternity, be subject to no further rebirths. Yet the theology of bhakti has him involved as if

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voluntarily in a perpetual transmigration, in which he does not cease to be himself liberated but which transforms him into a Saviour: the beings of our triple world are reborn, or attain liberation, within his transmigration. Thus the ineluctable flow of discontinuous instants is grasped within a perspective of eternity, thanks to an eternal return. The instant exists only for eternity, just as life in this world acquires its meaning only through the liberation which denies it.

But the structuring of cosmic time does not stop there. A kalpa is in turn made up of a thousand times four *yugas* or a thousand 'great yugas' which, this time, are measured in years of the gods—the gods of Vedic sacrifice; the 'great yuga', amounting to twelve thousand years of the gods, is divided into four yugas of unequal length and unequal value, separated by 'twilights'. Finally, it is said that one human year is a day and a night of the gods, which means that one year of the gods is equivalent to three hundred and sixty-five human years. The fantastic figures one arrives at by counting each great period in human years manage to present a reassuring image of the universe. Present-day man is always at the centre of a cosmic period sufficiently long for no universal cataclysm to be in sight.

The level of the yuga itself corresponds to another level of manifestation of deity which again highlights the tension characteristic of the world of bhakti. Expressed here is the very widespread idea of successive ages of humanity which is created in a state of perfection and progressively deteriorates. The four yugas are named after the four throws of a die, and Hindus concur with all the peoples of the world in saying that we live in the worst age, the one in which social disorder is at its peak—an idea which bears witness to the sense of the gap between the norm and the reality. Dharma is so weakened, the Vedas are so forgotten and the Brahmans so little respected that the supreme Puruṣa has to incarnate itself specially in the 'triple world' so as to come and restore order: this 'descent' of the deity is the *avatāra*. The real unit of time must here be the 'great yuga', since there are a thousand of them in one kalpa: an avatāra myth—such as that of Kṛṣṇa which forms the core of the *Mahābhārata*—seems to belong at the point of transition between the fourth yuga (*Kaliyuga*) of one 'great yuga' and the first of the next 'great yuga', which is naturally a sort of golden age (*kṛtayuga*, literally 'perfect age'). The avatāra is often a prince—or a Brahman with warlike qualities—who provokes the destruction of humanity

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through war, so as to enable the world to start anew. This war of catastrophic dimensions presents itself as a pale image of the reabsorption of the world at the end of a kalpa, and the order of 'salvation' which it promises remains sharply defined: the loss suffered by the wicked ought to ensure the triumph of the good. Thus even Buddha can become an avatāra of Viṣṇu: he came to earth to complete the misleading of the wicked by his false doctrine and so provoke momentary chaos which only the good will survive.

However, the myths situate the different known avatāras at the transition between the yugas themselves. In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa appears at the point where the third yuga gives way to the fourth—the latter being the worst, which is not very consistent with the idea, actually echoed by the myth, that he brings a new golden age. In fact, the four-yuga structure which describes the progressive decline of dharma has to follow not only the model of the throws of the die but also a more general quadripartite model (there are four varṇas, four stages of life, four goals of man, four Vedas, etc.) Besides, the avatāra theory did not spring from a Brahman's brain in its fully-fledged form. Even the classical list of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu (which has regional variants) leaves one to guess the use made of the different motifs. The Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar and the Dwarf, for example, are well-known cosmogonic themes from the Revelation, re-used as avatāras by means of the addition of a demonic figure—the *asura*—which symbolizes social Evil and which they must overcome, whereas Narasiṃha ('Lion-man', or rather, no doubt: 'lion among men', i.e. 'king'), Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are probably major gods of a given territory within the geographical area occupied by Hindu society. In the contemporary religion there is in fact an unlimited number of avatāras, and one finds avatāras of Śiva as well as of Viṣṇu. But the classical theory could only acknowledge the avatāras of Viṣṇu, in view of the avatāra's role as restorer of the dharmic order and Viṣṇu's essential link with the society based on sacrifice, and therefore on brahmanic dharma.

One already sees the essential function of the yugas in the structure of time, thanks to the direct intervention in our world of the supreme deity which it makes possible, thanks also to the unlimited possibilities it offers for integrating local deities into mainstream Hinduism: a local divinity of the high castes is immediately declared an avatāra.[23] Śiva and Viṣṇu appear in the

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temples under very varied names which sometimes recall their initial functions in the Revelation, and sometimes link them to a particular place. As a result, the forms in which they are worshipped are also very varied: for example, the Veṅkateśvara of Tirupati (near Madras) cannot be confused with the Viṭhobā of Pandharpur (in Mahārāṣṭra); but they are both Viṣṇu.

Salvation

This open structure, so rich in possibilities, is also one of the weak points in the theology of bhakti: the effort to integrate 'worldly' concerns into a religion of salvation leaves some of the joins clearly visible. The texts do not agree on the values predominating in each yuga; but it is no surprise to see Knowledge or tapas in the first yuga, and sacrifice in one of the later yuga, whereas our epoch, Kali, is characterized rather by an all-purpose substitute for sacrifices, the gift—to the Brahmans, of course. The gift is conceived as the minimum performance of dharma, short of which there is no dharma left at all. However, this systematization still remains set within the orthodox perspective, which indeed presides over the whole theory of the four yugas, and gives no clue as to how it integrates with the conception of bhakti. In fact it cannot be separated from it, once it is recalled that it is the god of bhakti who is incarnated on earth to save dharma.

The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* (Book VI), one of the great Purāṇas in which Vaiṣṇavite bhakti is unfolded, offers one of the most striking presentations in this respect. Since it has to end, as theoretically every good Purāṇa should, with an account of the end of the world, the last part of it opens with a description of the Kali age, which duly includes all the evils which afflict a declining society:[24] neither the Brahmans nor the Kṣatriyas are doing their duty; the Śūdras no longer obey the higher castes and couple with Brahman women (so peopling the soil of India with Caṇḍālas!); the Vedas are no longer recited, and so on. It is a familiar story and as usual the Kaliyuga is the worst of all yugas. And yet, the next chapter introduces, without any transition, the great Brahman 'seer' Vyāsa, whom tradition credits with the 'unfolding' of the Vedas in their present form, as well as the compilation of the epics and the Purāṇas. Such a figure cannot be suspected of non-conformity with dharma. Yet, while performing his ablutions in the Ganges, he utters such strange

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exclamations that his disciples ask him to explain, which he does: the Kaliyuga is the most blessed age, because it is now that salvation is most easily obtained. One only has to invoke the name of God—one of the names of Viṣṇu, of course, in this context—in order to obtain supreme grace. But this Hindu version of the Beatitudes goes still further: 'Blessed are the Śūdras'! Vyāsa proclaims, 'Blessed too are women.' We prick up our ears: no doubt he is going to explain that in the Kaliyuga Śūdras and women can, like anybody else, invoke the name of God and so achieve salvation. But no, that is not what he says: Śūdras and women are blessed (i.e. now, in the Kaliyuga) because they only have to do their duty—*svadharma*—in order to be saved. Whereas in a strictly orthodox view the castes outside the three higher varṇas, and even ultimately those outside the first varṇa, were excluded from liberation, bhakti grants even Śūdras and women access to liberation by the simple performance of their traditional function. They have indeed come up in the world; and not in the way one might have expected within the logic of bhakti. It is clearly not self-evident that devotion to God purely and simply replaces the traditional secular religion. Rather, it is the latter which seeks new vigour within the framework of bhakti.

The remarkable thing about these words of Vyāsa's is that they highlight, within a single speech, both the explosive potential which bhakti contains if its logic is followed through to its conclusions, and also its role of conserving the order of dharma. They give the key to the tension, which can be felt in the major currents of bhakti, between the concern for a thoroughly orthodox purity and the opening-up to the Śūdras.[25] So it is that South Indian Śaivism, as well as the Vaiṣnavism of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, combine vegetarianism with an underlying liberal outlook. In the first case, the Śūdras are, moreover, integrated not so much in the name of a negation of impurity as in the name of the conception of the divine Yogin as transcending the pure and the impure. The mythology readily presents Śiva in impure guises which shock the Brahmans, in order to teach that the salvation of bhakti is beyond secular distinctions of caste and of purity: for example, he is a hunter, and his four hounds are the Vedas. There could be no clearer image of the reversal of 'worldly' values, according to which hunting is a vice, grudgingly allowed to kings, and the dog, an impure creature the mere sight of

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which puts a modern-day Brahman to flight. The legend of Kaṇṇapa, the Śaivite saint of Kāḷahasti, has the same implication: Kaṇṇapa is a professional huntsman, a great devotee of Śiva to whom he offers the flesh of animals killed in the hunt, after having tasted it; the faults of impurity are compounded. The *liṇga*, a symbol of Śiva, receives no animal sacrifice. The animal victim offered up in the Vedic sacrifices was in any case normally a domestic animal, not game. Furthermore, the god is always the first to be served, and his worshippers may only have the remains (which, in temple worship, become the sign of his grace—*prasāda*). But Śiva accepts his bhakta's offering and one day, to test his sincerity, produces tears in one of the eyes of the liṅga. Kaṇṇapa at once plucks out one of his own eyes and offers it to God. The tears instantly stop. Shortly afterwards, the other eye of the liṅga also seems to weep. Kaṇṇapa wants to offer his second eye, but to be sure of finding the weeping eye when he is blind, he puts his left foot on it. Yet another abominable impurity: his foot on the liṅga and, worse still, his left foot! But Śiva then appears to his bhakta and restores his sight, showing that he has received his gesture with favour.

At the same time, present-day popular imagery portrays the head and torso of Śiva (and his wife) as they stand over the cow Kāmadhenu, a symbol of 'this-worldly' values. Depicted within the cow are all the great deities of the Vedic pantheon, as well as the Trimūrti, including Śiva: it is clear that the supreme form of Śiva transcends the Trimūrti and the whole complex of values and deities which accompanies it, but does not abolish them. Therefore, although the Śūdras are admitted to the Śaivite 'sacraments' which are linked to salvation, they do not have access to all the degrees of these sacraments. The social hierarchy still counts.

The case of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas reveals an even more contemporary tension. These Brahman inheritors of Tamil-language Vaiṣṇavite bhakti, which flourished in the south for several centuries before it spread northwards, had at the end of the eleventh century a great theologian and reformer in the person of Rāmānuja. If the legend is to be believed, Rāmānuja was concerned to put into practice the teachings of bhakti (which he developed into a Vedāntic system) and to break the taboos which prevented him from mingling with people of lower caste. The community of bhaktas could not admit

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the prevailing social hierarchy. Today, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas are divided into two violently opposed groups, those of the north and those of the south. The former, who write in Sanskrit, have a justified reputation for orthodoxy. Their temples remain largely closed to non-Hindus. When one inquires—of other Brahmans—the reasons for their extreme rigidity, the answer is always the same: they want it to be forgotten that at one time in the past they opened their ranks to Śūdras, and that one cannot be entirely sure of the purity of their birth. So we have here a case of a sectarian caste which preferred its social status to the community between brothers which bhakti seemed to call for.

This is only an extreme example of what happened in virtually all sectors of bhakti: the universality of salvation had to accommodate itself to the secular hierarchy. This is all the more striking in that the Hinduism of South India was for centuries cheek by jowl with a powerful Buddhism and with a Jainism which has not entirely disappeared, in other words religions of salvation for which Vedic orthodoxy lacked any basis. In spite of the fact that Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites have had their own authoritative texts, a total rejection of their Vedic origins would have spelled the loss of their identity as Hindus. In fact they incorporated the Vedas without denying them, and with them a whole conception of society. In practice, the temples are not only distinguished as Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite. They are also differentiated as high-caste temples, both Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite, where the offerings are vegetable, and low-caste temples, where animal victims are sacrificed even today, despite the multitude of official bans. We recognize here the opposition between the vegetarianism of the Brahmans and the meat diet of the lower castes, but also theoretically of the warrior princes. Between deities of the high and the low castes relations are established that are reminiscent of the social hierarchy of their respective devotees. It is also natural, in view of what we know of the relationship of Viṣṇu and Śiva to Vedic sacrifice, and therefore to the dharmic order, that low-caste deities should be more related to Śiva or to deities connected with Śiva. Symmetrically, Śiva welcomes Viṣṇu into his temple, whereas the opposite rarely occurs (especially in South India, where sectarian oppositions have been violent): Viṣṇu tolerates Śiva in his vicinity rather than in his temple, but he does tolerate him. Likewise, if the low-caste deities are excluded from the

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pure temple, they are not far from it. On these close interconnections, which reflect those of the social fabric, bhakti has built up mythic themes which explain the very real universality of salvation: the low-caste god becomes a minister and therefore a servant of the high-caste god. Or again, the low-caste god is a demon who is converted to the pure god; the latter gives him salvation and makes him his guardian. Through these motifs one recognizes the idea expressed by Vyāsa, that the Śūdra secures salvation by serving the higher castes.

Faced with these demands of orthodoxy, bhakti aroused religious movements of opposition to the Brahmans, tending to deny all hierarchy. Rāmānuja's attempt was taken up again tirelessly and more radically by reformers from all points of the compass, seeking to establish a community of devotees. In the twelfth century, for example, the Śaivite Brahman Basava founded in the Deccan the Liṅgāyat sect which, even today, is distinguished by it opposition to the Brahmans—particularly in the political field. The fact that this movement of bhakti, in spite of its negations, still draws inspiration from brahmanic renunciation can be seen in its attachment to vegetarianism, and in the practice of burying the dead in the seated posture (i.e. like yogins). Moreover it has its own renouncers, married or living in monasteries, who serve as priests. The coming of Islam provoked in North India, from the fifteenth century, a series of reforming movements, either syncretic or revivalist. Kṛṣṇaite bhakti soon dominated from east to west. But whatever the intentions of the founders, the caste is always reborn from its ashes within the sect, unless the sect finally coincides with the caste.

The end of the world and individual salvation

But what really is this salvation which bhakti grants to all? Brahmanic liberation is the fusion of the individual ātman into Ātman or the supreme Puruṣa. Bhakti transposes this idea into mythical terms and promises the faithful 'the world of Viṣṇu' or 'the world of Śiva'. This is the last paradise from which one is no longer reborn. In principle it is granted instantaneously by divine grace, and the hagiographic legends leave no hint of any delay between death and access to the supreme abode. But if we turn back to the Purāṇas, on which we saw the cosmogonic and cosmological framework of bhakti being built up, the situation is different. Since

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the supreme Puruṣa is the yogin who manifests himself in the rhythm of the great temporal periods by manifesting the universe, individual salvation has to be integrated into this rhythm and must also translate in its own way the hierarchy of the values which the successive levels of the cosmogony brought to light. It is the accounts of cosmic reabsorption which inform us about this, and, at the same time, they reveal a whole structure of the cosmos which has not so far become apparent.

It will be recalled that the Vedic revelation had a 'heaven'—*svarga*—where the ancestors dwelt with the gods, and that the *Upaniṣads* opposed to this heaven gained through rites a liberation from rebirths through knowledge or yoga which caused empirical man to lose his individuality and united him for ever with *Brahman* or the supreme Puruṣa. None of this is suppressed, everything is left in its place, and svarga itself becomes a stage in liberation, just as the empirical world only has meaning in relation to that liberation. This necessarily entails the mingling of some seemingly opposed values: at the end of the kalpa, dwelling in svarga are the Vedic gods, all the well-born people who have observed dharma and who receive regular ancestor worship from their descendants, their 'clientele', which no doubt means the inferiors who have served them well, and also the renouncers—if this is the correct interpretation of the less technical and more mythical terms used in the Purāṇas. It is the end of the world, at the beginning of a night of Brahmā, which enables all this host to rise to higher spheres from which they will not be reborn. The highest sphere to which they then rise is the 'world of Brahmā' or 'of the *Brahman*', where they are all equal with Brahmā or the *Brahman*, without a sovereign, filled with joy and purity. The mythical transposition is clear: from the idea of liberation through renunciation of all individual identity and all social hierarchy, we have moved to the notion of a world in which all the members are equal and indistinguishable. This does not yet represent final liberation, but only the second stage, the one which seems to correspond to the orthodox idea of individual liberation. But it must not be forgotten that a cosmic period is also involved: the end of a kalpa leads to access to a world in which one has to dwell while waiting for a mahākalpa in order to go 'higher' in liberation.

The rhythm of the days and nights of Brahmā is linked, as we

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have seen, to the manifestation of deity in the form of the Trimūrti. It is natural that the 'world of Brahmā' should appear at this level, where Brahmā is both the higher *Brahman* of liberation (when he turns towards the cosmic night) and the lower Brahman who creates by individualizing himself. But the 'world of Śiva' or the 'world of Viṣṇu' can only be attained at the end of a life of Brahmā or mahākalpa. So at the level of the Trimūrti, when the cosmic night comes, the deity gathers into itself, in different 'worlds', the totality of ātmans, both liberated and non-liberated. Only the liberated rise within it to the 'world of Brahmā'; the others will be reborn at the next dawn of Brahmā. After Rudra-Śiva has destroyed the world by fire, thus allowing the exodus of the liberated, and the flood has covered all that remains, the form of the deity that presides over the cosmic night and bears all creatures within it is called Nārāyaṇa. This Nārāyaṇa, which is already abundantly attested in the revealed texts as identical with the supreme Puruṣa, is thus, as it were, the fourth form of the Trimūrti. In fact, it is very quickly identified with Viṣṇu, and in the *Purāṇas* we find the conservative function of the Viṣṇu of the Trimūrti interpreted as presiding over the cosmic night. Nārāyaṇa is a yogic form of Viṣṇu. He is depicted reclining on the ocean of the flood, and his sleep is a yogic concentration, shallow enough to retain the memory of the creatures who are to be reborn. The traditional iconography adds a further symbol to this picture: between Nārāyaṇa and the ocean is the snake Śeṣa, which serves as a couch for the sleeping god. The snake universally symbolizes the formless, the chaos which precedes the cosmos. Its name Śeṣa, 'remainder', points explicitly back to India: the cosmic fire presided over by Rudra-Śiva is assimilated to a monstrous sacrifice, a sacrifice which is no longer Viṣṇu because it destroys the cosmos instead of keeping it in a state of prosperity: the charred residue is conceived as the remnants of what has been offered to the deity, which in a normal sacrifice is consumed by the officiating priests and the 'offerer' of sacrifice, so as to ensure them the beneficial effects of the sacrifice. Thus the snake Śeṣa is here the promise of a coming renewal of the cosmos, the assurance that the destruction is not final. It is the correlative of Nārāyaṇa, who bears within him the ātmans destined to be reborn.

From this very complicated schema, a few essential features may be extracted. First, the practice of dharma prepares directly for

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liberation, which is as one might expect if the religion of bhakti is truly the attempt to introduce renunciation into secular life. We shall in fact see how it succeeds in combining the demands of dharma, essentially the performance of rites, with renunciation: for was this world not created under the sign of the Vedic sacrifice, and does not the deity 'descend'—*avatṛ*—into this world in order to rescue an imperilled dharma? This does not mean that bhakti cannot be defined by an attitude of love towards God, but this love, in accordance with Purāṇic conceptions, may be manifested in rites—*karman*. On the other hand, and this is again a logical consequence, liberation cannot be a purely individual matter. It is collective, although obtaining it on earth depends at least as much on individual attitude as on social category. The definitive abolition of the empirical ego, on the death of the liberated, makes any individual transformation meaningless, and it is the totality of the inhabitants of heaven, including the gods, who rise through the spheres. None of those living on earth at the moment of the cosmic cataclysm are saved, because their presence on earth implies that they are not without karman. So there is also a sort of equality of the non-liberated who are condemned to be reborn, which will last as long as the cosmic night.

But it is perhaps more important to note that, ultimately, access to liberation is withdrawn to a fabulous distance, to which the authors of the *Purāṇas* seem readily to resign themselves. One is almost inclined to see here a subtle devaluation of liberation. This is probably true of our Brahmans, who were content with their place in society and readily accepted the idea of being reborn in it. The prospect of liberation becomes as remote in time as the prospect of an end of the world. One might even say that its content is degraded in the mythic transposition and that it loses much of its interest. Was this not inevitable in this compromise with the world . . .? But this would be too hasty a judgement. The theoretical framework of the *Purāṇas* is inspired by bhakti, that is, by a renewed notion of God and of his relation to his creatures. Liberation can no doubt not remain exactly what it was in the *Upaniṣads*. Even if it is difficult to bring together all the variants of bhakti under a single heading, it can be seen in a general way that it displaces the devotee's aspirations. Whether the latter's love dictates to him a clear and definite line of conduct in the world—as is the case in the

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doctrine of the *Bhagavad Gītā* which we shall shortly examine—or whether it is so violent as to lead him to seek inward union with the hidden God in mystical experience, bhakti has the effect of bringing attention back to the present instant and therefore to this life. What the bhakta cannot endure is the absence of his God *hic et nunc*; he wants to feel that He is present. Kṛṣṇa has to show himself to Arjuna in all his glory and power in order to satisfy him (this is the vision of Chapter XI of the *Bhagavad Gītā*), and the most mystical of bhaktas asks nothing more than the inward experience of divine presence. This presence so fulfils him that he wishes for nothing more, and endless rebirths as a bhakta constitute for him the most blessed prospect imaginable. While being a man-in-the-world different from others, the bhakta too thus ultimately accepts this life. *His* renunciation is of another sort. The hagiography of bhakti shows us saints totally unsuited for normal life: bad husbands and bad fathers, they are only fit to sing the praises of God or contemplate him in ecstasy. But Hindu society, living on the same beliefs as them, integrates these 'deviants'—who are not figures of pure legend—with astonishing ease.

There is a corollary not to be forgotten: if salvation has become universal, the Brahman has nothing to lose, since the rites and the love of God give him a twofold guarantee for the future. It is therefore not surprising that the devotees of bhakti include very orthodox Brahmans like the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, who are perhaps not among the 'madmen of God', but who have nonetheless accepted the idea of a god who sanctifies their karman and this world. The Vedānta of Śaṅkara could dispense with bhakti and integrated it only at a lower level. That of Rāmānuja, by contrast, modifies the conception of the Absolute in such a way as to identify the supreme *Brahman* with the Viṣṇu of bhakti. That of Madhva (twelfth century) takes the opposite course and goes so far as to introduce the hierarchy into paradise, abandoning all monism.

Desireless activity

Although it draws the attention of its devotees back towards this world, bhakti does not jettison the Upaniṣadic renouncer's analysis of desire as the motivating force behind human acts; however, its conclusions run in the opposite direction. If, in the act, it is desire

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which is bad and alienating, then it is desire which must be suppressed rather than the act. The problem is clearly that of knowing whether there is any further reason to act once there is no more desire. The anthropology from which we started provides only a negative answer, since all human activity has been placed under the sign of kāma.

It is theology which would give rise, not to a new anthropology—India has only ever had one—but to a divine model for a human activity apparently devoid of foundation. This is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in which, in the battle between the enemy cousins, the avatāra Kṛṣṇa plays the part of the charioteer who drives the chariot of Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava, the ideal prince and a close friend of Kṛṣṇa. The image of the charioteer in fact expresses the function of spiritual guide performed by the human form of the supreme God, in this battle for dharma: it is simply a transparent symbol of the very function of the avatāra. Of the three levels of divine manifestation which the *Purāṇas* or the epic offer us, supreme Yogin, Trimūrti and avatāra, it is clearly the last one, the closest to man since it is incarnated on this earth, that presents itself as a model to imitate. But the avatāra is essentially identical to the supreme God, it is the manifestation of his 'interest' in the world. It is therefore the God of bhakti who reveals himself in this way, and he offers himself so well as a model only because there is a relationship of love between him and his worshipper. This relationship is itself the transposition of the desire for liberation. God, in making himself accessible to his worshipper and granting him his grace, becomes the object of the supreme desire, the one which suppresses all other desires. So it is impossible to explain the teaching of the *Gītā* on activity without desire without this precondition of a transfer of man's whole capacity for desire onto God—a desire for God which is expressed always in very Indian terms by the desire to see God, but which is made explicit, in conformity with the renouncer's move towards liberation, as an identification with Him. 'I desire—*icchāmi*—to see thee with thy tiara, and with mace and disc in hand. Assume that same four-armed form', Arjuna implores in the *Gītā* (XI. 46). But Kṛṣṇa's language is less naive: 'Many are they who—freed from attachment, fear and anger—are made of me, are grounded in me and, purified by the austerities of knowledge, have attained my being. In whatever way

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they come before me, in that same way do I communicate—*bhajāmi*—myself to them. Men on all sides follow my path' (IV. 10–11). The vocabulary is that of the most traditional renunciation, but it is God who speaks directly and makes himself a guru. To identify oneself with God now means first of all behaving like Him as far as possible, and when one is a prince, who has to protect dharma at the point of the sword, like Arjuna, much is possible: 'There is nothing that I have to do in the three worlds, nothing that I have not obtained, nothing that I have to gain; yet I am involved in activity. If indeed I should ever not be tirelessly engaged in activity, men on all sides would follow my path. These worlds would be plunged into oblivion if I were to do no work. I would be the author of (universal) confusion. I would cause the ruin of these creatures' (III. 22–4). Such is the ideal of action that is put forward: to act without having any personal goal, any desire for any 'fruit' for oneself. 'The four-fold varṇa was created by me, through the differentiation of their qualities and acts. Although I am the author of this, know me to be one who does nothing and who does not change. Acts do not stain me; nor do I desire the fruits of acts. Thus he who knows me is not fettered by acts. Knowing that the ancients, desirous of liberation—*mumukṣu*—performed acts, you should therefore perform acts—*kuru karma*—as the ancients did in former times' (IV. 13–15). The phrase *kuru karma* can be translated both as 'to act, to perform works' and as 'to perform rites'. And the double meaning is even more apparent when Kṛṣṇa says clearly: 'He who performs an obligatory act without leaning toward the fruit of his act—he is more a sannyāsin and a yogin than one who is without (the sacrificial) fire, or one who is without rites (*kriyā*)' (VI. 1). The new ideal is indeed formulated in relation to traditional renunciation: you have been told that the sannyāsin or the yogin was he who abandoned his fire or his rites, but I, Kṛṣṇa the avatāra, I say to you that you should keep your fires and your observances, do your ritual and other duty, without any desire for reward. You should act, like me, for the good of the worlds.

The context is well known: this dialogue, by turns anguished and passionate on Arjuna's side, but supremely impassive on Kṛṣṇa's side, takes place as the great battle for dharma is about to begin between the camp of the Pāṇḍavas and that of their cousins, the Kauravas, in the *Mahābhārata*.[26] All the negotiations have failed,

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the troops are in position, and only the signal is awaited to begin the fight. It is then that Arjuna hesitates at the task before him. To ensure the triumph of his elder brother, the son of the god Dharma, he must, with his army, kill members of his family, his first cousins, his revered great-uncle Bhīṣma, his guru Droṇa.[27] Unlike Yudhiṣṭhira, he is not tempted to escape by renouncing the world, but his duty is not clear to him. It is then that his friend Kṛṣṇa encourages him and proves to him that he must do what he has to do: are not those whom he must kill immortal in any case, through their ātmans? Is it not his svadharma to fight, to kill and, if need be, to be killed on the field of battle? We again encounter the ethical problems which cropped up previously, and this time presented in dramatic form. Kṛṣṇa does not simply declare that one cannot escape one's svadharma; he proves that in performing it, one also performs the holiest action from the standpoint of salvation, so long as one acts without anger or hatred, without any desire for reward beyond the divine friendship. But Kṛṣṇa never forgets that he is talking to a prince, whose svadharma has two inseparable aspects: the task of the warrior, with all the violence and horror this entails—there is never any question of a morality brought into war to soften its brutality; only the warrior's inward attitude has to be modified with a view to his salvation—and the ritual function of the 'sacrificer', who must be exact in his observances in order to ensure the prosperity of the country.

In other words, the universalizing of salvation by bhakti, the consecration of violence in its impurest forms, comes through the avatāra who offers himself as a model to the king and thereby provides the reason for this final level of divine manifestation. The specifically royal values had to be justified, brought into the orbit of salvation, in order for the two types of men distinguished at the beginning (see p. 64) to have equal access, each in his own role, to divine grace.

The vision which Kṛṣṇa gives of himself in Chapter XI helps to unify the two aspects of the warrior's ethic within the general framework of bhakti: he then appears in the terrifying form of Time 'swallowing up' the worlds at the end of a cosmic period. Arjuna sees all the combatants in this war, good and bad alike, rushing into its gaping mouth. It is an awesome apparition, reserved in the *Purāṇas* for Rudra-Śiva, of deity reabsorbing the creatures into

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itself.[28] The war, in which Kṛṣṇa will play a major role right up to the end without directly taking part in the fighting, prefigures the end of the world which we have already seen assimilated to a cosmic sacrifice. In associating himself with Kṛṣṇa in the battle of dharma, Arjuna also becomes the 'sacrificer' of this war, he who will ensure the victory of dharma and so enable the three worlds to be maintained. Every action becomes a ritual, just as every effort to kill desire becomes a war. It is therefore not surprising to see in the *Bhagavad Gītā* a generalization of the use of the term *yoga* which makes it more than ever impossible to translate. Arjuna's action must be an act of yoga, like the act of the supreme deity. Because it is action, his yoga is a *karmayoga*, a yoga of the act. But because this action is performed in full awareness of what it has to be, this yoga is also a *jñānayoga*, a yoga of knowledge. Finally, because this disinterested action which even runs counter to the warrior's natural feelings is only possible through an unconditional surrender of self to God, it is also a *bhaktiyoga*, a yoga of devotion. Subsequently these three terms became the names of three separate paths to liberation, and this is the case even today. But here they only designate three aspects of the action of the prince: it is surely no accident that the yoga in which the three elements are held in equilibrium is still today called *rājayoga*, 'royal yoga'.

This yoga within-the-world does not exclude the other yoga: the *Gītā* recognizes and recommends the usual practices of yoga—postures, breath control and mental concentration. Perhaps they have to be regarded as exercises which make perfectly disinterested action possible? The result, in any case, must be an activity without residue, a karman which gives rise to no future rebirths, which does not bind its author but, on the contrary, leads him to liberation: 'He who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is grounded in wisdom, who acts for the sake of sacrifice—all of his karman dissolves away. The act of offering is the *Brahman*, the oblation, which is the *Brahman*, is offered by the *Brahman* into the fire of the *Brahman*. It is to the *Brahman* alone that he should go, he who concentrates himself—*samādhi*—upon the act of the *Brahman*' (IV.23–4). Have we really left Upaniṣadic speculations behind us? Or have they rather been applied to justify in absolute terms human activity defined according to the secular brahmanical perspective?

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Even today the *Bhagavad Gītā* is the pious Hindu's bedside book. Even if his practices are no longer those of narrowly defined orthodoxy, he will always find something in this text to reassure him. It is clear that this gospel of bhakti in fact preserves the orthodox values, by promising salvation to him who observes his dharma. Dharma triumphs all the more since there is nothing else to offer as a goal to the man who lives in the world: to observe dharma is to help to maintain the world, to do the work of Viṣṇu. But it must also lead to liberation. Here too one feels that liberation is liable to remain somewhat theoretical, and that action for the world is bound to bring the world back to the centre of the stage. The prince remains first and foremost a prince. The tension inherent in bhakti is only resolved on a theoretical level. All it can offer this world is a mere supplementary guarantee, since it fails to provide it with a *raison d'être*.[29] These words of Kṛṣṇa's, again from the *Gītā*, highlight this situation: 'This world is fettered by acts—*karman*—other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, perform acts towards that end, freed from all attachment. In the beginning, having emitted the creatures together with the sacrifice, the Lord of creatures said, "May you increase through this. May this be the milch cow of your desires" ' (III, 9–10). This image of the cow Kāmadhenu is inevitably associated with sacrifice. But can one then sacrifice, being freed from all attachment?

We have seen how the world of bhakti was bound up with renunciation, and more specifically with yoga. There is however another term which appears in the epic and the *Purāṇas*, and which the *Bhagavad Gītā* returns to several times, opposing it to *yoga*: Sāṅkhya is in fact, in the list of classical philosophical systems, always associated with Yoga while at the same time distinct from it.[30] In the *Gītā*, it can be seen fairly clearly that yoga deals mainly with practice, with action as I have sought to analyse it, whereas Sāṅkhya is concerned with knowledge. This would be clearer if the two terms did not serve to distinguish two groups of people rather than two aspects of a single mode of action. At all events, it is in relatively late systematic treatises that one sees the two orthodox systems of Yoga and Sāṅkhya being constituted. They continue to be linked in theory as they were in the epic, but this does not mean that they hold similar positions on all points. Moreover, although they seem to have their roots in an ancient tradition, it would not be

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easy to relate them to sectors of Hindu society which profess them. They provide few texts, although their categories and the questions they deal with, pervade the other systems, classical or sectarian, and inspire many polemics. One finds no continuous tradition which explicitly claims descent from them, but rather a diffuse utilization of them. Thus, starting with Rāmānuja, Vaiṣṇavite Vedānta integrated Sāṅkhya categories; yoga was very soon admitted alongside the path of pure knowledge preached by Śaṅkara, and this 'orthodox' yoga referred back principally to the classical yoga of Patañjali. The sectarian systems which constituted their own Revelation, the Śaivite *Āgamas* or the Vaiṣṇavite *Saṃhitās*, only complicate the Sāṅkhya categories, in particular by adding new categories from above.

Sāṅkhya proper is nothing other than a reworking, half-conceptual and half-mythical, of the Purāṇic categories of primary cosmogony; and, as we have seen, this was itself an appropriation of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* stages of yogic ascension, with the added element of *ahaṃkāra*. It also makes them the successive planes of manifestation of the cosmos, but with one important modification: the structure is decapitated, losing the supreme Puruṣa from which formerly everything issued and in which everything had to be reabsorbed. The system becomes overtly dualistic: opposed to a primordial Nature which evolves in the rhythm of the Purāṇic cosmic periods are *puruṣas*, individual 'souls', which have to liberate themselves from the processes of Nature to which they are fettered. If we hold to the teachings of the *Sāṅkhyakārikās*,—a short basic text of this system, but one which is somewhat obscure on certain points—we find that while yoga perhaps constitutes the required method for liberation, bhakti seems to be wholly excluded, since the supreme Puruṣa is no longer present. Nor does anything suggest a collective exodus of the liberated towards the supreme abode. There is, however, a curious link between a verse of the *Sāṅkhyakārikā*—in which Nature withdraws from the puruṣa which has achieved knowledge of its true identity, as a modest woman hides because a man has seen her—and a mythic theme of Kṛṣṇaite bhakti (*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*' (X) which shows the mischievous child Kṛṣṇa stealing the cowherdesses' clothes as they splash in the river, so that they have to climb out of the water in embarrassed nakedness and look for their garments. Moreover, Sāṅkhya develops a theory of

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causality emphasizing the pre-existence of the effect in its cause, which greatly attenuates the consequences of Nature-puruṣa dualism, while consecrating it. Nature, evolved and 'involved', is always the same; it evolves only with a view to the liberation of the puruṣas, but nothing happens apart from this liberation. The cosmic periods have lost their link with the yoga of the supreme Puruṣa, but they have not thereby gained any new meaning; on the contrary, they have lost that which made their structure intelligible. Although the monistic Vedānta philosopher, Śāṅkara, argued extensively against the Sāṅkhya theory of causality, this theory was no doubt the 'realist' equivalent of his own theory of *māyā*, 'cosmic illusion'. The set of problems is still the same, to such an extent that one of the most ancient commentators on the *Sāṅkhyakārikā* already glosses the term *pradhāna*, 'original Nature', as *māyā* and *Brahman*!

Overall, therefore, this system looks like an artificial construct, an attempt by the Brahmans to take over the framework of bhakti while precisely emptying it of its bhakti. We have seen how the notion of a supreme God, omniscient and omnipotent, was rejected by the most orthodox-minded Brahmans. Sāṅkhya may be an orthodox endeavour of the same order, an empty systematization intended to 'co-opt' a godless form of bhakti. Yoga seems to be an endeavour of the same sort. It does in itself constitute a complete yogic system, it does not even use any longer the categories of Sāṅkhya, but it minimizes the importance of the supreme God, Īśvara, the 'Lord'. He is little more than an object of meditation. When he is also made the 'controller' of the mechanics of the creatures' karman, no one is taken in: karman is precisely that which operates automatically, and the very idea of control is in contradiction with its nature. We see therefore, once again, the efforts of orthodox thought to remove all content from the notion of God. In practical terms, this makes yoga a system in which the values of the traditional renouncer are revived—the virtues initially demanded, purity, asceticism—and which can thus serve as a frame of reference for Brahmans' yogas, whose concrete disciplines are developed partly outside of it.

Although one essential dimension of the Hindu universe is still missing, we already see the proliferation of divine forms which leads the western reader to raise the eternal question of monotheism and

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polytheism. Everything has been said in this area. Sometimes commentators frankly assert the polytheism of a religion which has covered India with shrines dedicated to innumerable deities, whose mythology creates gods out of any notion or value. One is indeed struck by the seriousness with which pilgrimages are conducted, each shrine in a given set being duly visited. Each sacred site is a reduced image of the complexity of the Hindu's concrete beliefs and the diversity of the deities to whom he gives worship. At other times one hears the rather well-known refrain that all these gods are nothing other than the *Brahman*. But we should distrust this abstract—and orthodox—rationalization of living beliefs. Moreover, the bhakta is almost always more particularly attached to a given form of the deity. He worships Viṣṇu, but the Viṣṇu of Śrīraṅgam rather than another, the liṅga of Śiva, but that of Cidambaram or Kāḷahasti. Or he is a devotee of Veṅkaṭeśvara at Tirupati, of Viṭhoba at Paṇḍharpur. . . . His devotion even multiplies the forms at will: the infant god who arouses paternal or maternal feelings, the young-man god, the yogin god, the hunter god, the terrible god . . . all the themes evoked around bhakti give rise to a divine form and a particular feeling on the part of the worshipper.[31] But he speaks of his God as of God: the Lord, the Blessed, the supreme Puruṣa. The names with which he invokes Him make Him the one and only God. This is what has sometimes led to the idea that the polytheism is only apparent and that, even if the Hindu accepts a multiplicity of gods, every time he addresses one of them, he considers him as unique.

However, this debate perhaps still leaves us too much in a western perspective. We have so far taken care to see Hinduism in essential relationship with a particular anthropology. We must maintain this relationship more than ever and understand in the light of it what happens in the Hindu's religious consciousness. We started out from the observation that at the level of secular society, both theoretical and concrete, there was no place for the human individual as such; the individual is only a unit within his group, caste or lineage, which determines his place in the hierarchy.[32] His place, in other words his relationship to all others, whether higher, lower or equal, is more important than what he is in himself. However, from his group he receives a certain idea of his duty, and of all the invisible realities on which it is based. The day he feels too

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strongly the relativity, or indeed the vanity, of what is expected of him, he breaks away from the group and attends to what is most essential and permanent within himself—the ātman, or the puruṣa. But this ātman, which still receives from the social group the revelation of its existence, does not thereby acquire determinations which, from our standpoint, would be characteristically human. On the contrary, it attains liberation, through knowledge or yoga, only by shedding all differentiation, by being absorbed into the Absolute where it finally loses all that remains of empirical individuality. The god of bhakti, the projection of the yogin into the absolute, partakes of the same inner void, the same lack of intrinsic unity. Even the devotee's relationship with this god cannot give him a 'personal' density which the devotee does not have and cannot even conceive of. Thus the most anthropomorphic forms are acceptable inasmuch as they are never more than 'names and forms', no more human than man himself is.

On the other hand, if the bhakta remains a man in the world, his relationship to deity cannot be defined simply as a mystical relationship to the one God.[33] God, like society, is bound up in a network of relationships in which his place defines the essential part of his nature. In particular we have seen that Vedic sacrifice remains the central reference point in relation to which Viṣṇu and Śiva are differentiated (although within the sects, the hierarchy that is established may be the opposite of what one might expect). The deity is also situated by vegetarian or carnivorous diet: the pure god is higher than the impure god, but neither can be isolated from the other. In such a context, one cannot really pose the question of monotheism or polytheism: the choice between alternatives is not pertinent. Each Hindu deity is part of a complex. If the Absolute is located anywhere, it is this complex and not one or another of its members. It is in this sense that 'all the gods are merely forms of *Brahman*'. Let us say that together they all constitute *Brahman*.

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CHAPTER 4

Divine Loves

To anyone at all familiar with Indian realities, it must seem strange that I have so far refrained from mentioning an omnipresent figure in the Hindu pantheon, the goddess, and also the religious movements which tend to give her pre-eminence over the male aspect—*Puruṣa*—of deity. This might be taken to imply acceptance of the theory which sees the female deity as an element external to brahmanism and its Vedic sources. According to this view, brahmanism is 'Aryan' and the goddess 'Dravidian'[1]. Likewise, tantrism[2] would be seen as an extra-Vedic, and probably older, religious form. Something analogous has, after all, already been said about bhakti. It must therefore be firmly restated that we are not entitled to isolate what presents itself to us as an integral part of the total structure of Hinduism. When one seeks to show the lines of force of such a complex religion, one necessarily adopts a particular order of exposition. But what comes last is no less essential; on the contrary, everything that precedes is needed in order to understand it. This is not to say that there were no goddesses before brahmanism—perhaps personifying mountains, for example—any more than one would deny the likelihood of there having been older gods. In any case, the historical data on this point provide hints rather than facts, and it is certainly more fruitful to see how the goddess's place is established within Hinduism, and how the tantric currents are linked to this whole set of ideas. That is certainly within our scope and forces us to acknowledge that to assert the alien origin of these elements casts no light whatsoever on what they may have been outside of the structure which now gives meaning to them.

On the other hand, it is perhaps useful to emphasize—in the light of the present state of 'dilettante' literature that appears on India, its goddesses and its tantrism—the fact that it is impossible to cause the Hindu goddess to spring, fully armed, out of the Vedas. What she presupposes, at all levels of her conception and her worship is, first of all, the clearly asserted complementarity between the inactive

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Male and the female Nature which emanates from it and transforms itself until it ultimately gives rise to our tangible world; but also the paradoxical conjunction of the most bloodthirsty war-making and of total detachment in the ideal king, who is himself a replica of the avatāra of the supreme god. To insist on this twofold foundation is to contradict every attempt to explain exaltation of the goddess as the esoteric face of a Vedic Revelation opening up in outward practices. The goddess, like the major gods of bhakti, only takes on her full scale in a confrontation between renunciation and the world of sacrifice. It remains to be understood how she is truly complementary to Viṣṇu and Śiva, and not simply a redundancy or an accretion, when the avatāric form of Viṣṇu has already presented itself as the model to be imitated in action in the person of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Privileged experiences

As we have seen, the Hindu religious consciousness has centred its thinking and its endeavour on ahaṃkāra, the function of the ego, and on the desire which is the everyday expression of it. The renouncer suppresses ahaṃkāra by breaking away from everything which gives him a place in society—his duties, but also his rights. The bhakta seeks to achieve the same result by replacing desire as the motor of his activity with the love and imitation of God. His love may take a mystical turn, but it is above all the quality of his acts — *karman*—which characterizes him, even if these amount to no more than worshipping God in a particular temple—for temple worship is performed for the good of the worlds, both for material prosperity and for the deliverance of all. The sannyāsin and the bhakta seek salvation in an exit from self, in an extension of the ātman beyond the bounds of the empirical 'ego', *aham*. But nothing forbids the search for other paths which may lead to this result, or rather, certain areas of experience which point to other possibilities.

It has already been observed (see p. 51) that desire, in the particular form of amorous desire, was not necessarily an assertion of the ego. Whereas, in 'moralizing' literature, human love is often contrasted with renunciation as its main enemy, erotic experience, essentially shared physical pleasure, is analysed as an experience of self-dispossession. And this dispossession is immediately associated

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with that achieved through yogic concentration; it is the analogue of the religious experience pursued by the renouncer: 'When thought is not reabsorbed in the act of love and in yogic concentration, what is the point of meditation? What is the point of the act of love?' The linkage between the two orders of experience goes much further than the search for an expression of mystic union in terms of human love. It is already clear that if the figure of the yogin can be projected into the deity, the act of love can also be transposed into the divine to express the union of the Puruṣa with the world, or more precisely with original Nature. The Puruṣa and Prakṛti[3] merge into one another, but, parallel to this, there must then be a spiritual path for man (and woman) which passes through the act of love. This is one of the mainstays of tantric practices in the Hindu consciousness.

Another area that has been explored at great length is that of aesthetic emotion. In point of fact, I hesitate to translate the Sanskrit term *rasa* by such an approximation. Is this, for the Hindu, a question of what we call the Beautiful, in other words an area of experience distinct from those of the True and the Good? Rather than seek to answer such an outrageously Western question, perhaps it is more useful to try to pin down the notion as it appears in Hindu literature. Etymologically, the term evokes flavour, the sensation given by the organ of taste, as well as the plant juice which has this flavour. But for the Hindu it immediately has an Upaniṣadic resonance: *Brahman* is *rasaghana*, 'a mass of flavour', and the term *rasa* is thus from the beginning very close to the term *ānanda*, the beatitude consubstantial with *Brahman* (cf. in particular *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II. 7.1). One cannot say definitely that this is why the term is consecrated to express aesthetic emotion as early as the oldest treatise we have on the subject, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* attributed to the mythical sage Bharata (first centuries AD?) and remains the only term used to designate this notion throughout all the schools of aesthetics—or rather, poetics.

Indeed, it seems essential to start with this observation: dramatic literature is at the heart of all Hindu aesthetic reflexion. Bharata's treatise includes dance in drama (*nāṭya* designates both), but dance is only the visual accompaniment of dramatic expression, and the latter is not separable from poetry proper. Song and its instrumental support are also part of the complex which constitutes dramatic art

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(and, nowadays, Indian cinema). The specifically visual arts are associated with architecture and are only discussed in normative accounts which pay little attention to the aesthetic effect on the beholder and user. This pre-eminence of the spoken word, and of a spoken word which tells a story at the same time as moving the listener, is not entirely accidental. The subjects of stage plays are largely taken from the epics—edifying and glorious subjects which strengthen the emotional bond between the sources of the Hindu tradition and the audience. The text of the *Mahābhārata* itself, as a totality, is regarded by the best theoreticians as capable of inducing *śāntarasa*, the rasa of peacefulness, in the listener, through the light it casts on the events of this world. What we call an 'epic' because it deals with princes and battles, is something quite different for the Hindu mind. But it is no doubt banal to conclude that Hindu literature is not a gratuitous art; art for art's sake is a product of the modern Western mind.

We are brought back more specifically to Hindu, and even brahmanic, reality when we look for the roots of this preponderance of the spoken word. If there is one female aspect of the divine which is clearly present in Vedic literature, it is precisely the word. It is the personification of the Revelation itself, the source of all knowledge of the invisible, as indispensable for living as is the sensory perception that brings us into contact with the sensible (and essentially visual) world. As the Vedic Word, the Upaniṣadic Word, it is the guide for 'worldly' life as for life outside the world, for the enjoyment of earthly goods through sacrifice as for renunciation of this enjoyment. Under the name of Sarasvatī, she is the wife of Brahmā. Bhakti also identifies her more or less explicitly with original nature, the Goddess. She is the expression of the Puruṣa which turns towards cosmic manifestation.

It may be thought that to connect this revealed Word with poetic or dramatic speech is to force more coherence on the Hindu mind than it has ever really had. To be sure, the connection is not a direct and conscious one, but it is nevertheless present, as may be witnessed in the history of doctrines: towards the end of the fifth century of the common era, a philosopher and grammarian named Bhartṛhari attempted to reverse perspectives in the concept of the Word. It is moreover probable that he drew his inspiration from earlier speculations, no longer extant, of which the greater part were

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perhaps not expressed in written works, but may rather have been integrated into yogic practices. Until Bhartṛhari, the revealed word was essentially conceived as being transmitted by word of mouth. The Nyāya school attributes to God the function of revealing it, and to the mythic 'seers' (*ṛṣis*) the power of perceiving it. In the orthodox systematisation that was presented in many late Upaniṣads, the revealed Word constitutes the lower *Brahman* (of which the syllable *Oṃ* is thus the epitome), in opposition to the higher *Brahman*, to which it lends access. It is a revolutionary perspective that Bhartṛhari introduces; yet he perceives himself as following the same brahmanic Revelation as the most orthodox of Brahmans. For him, the revealed Word is internal to *every* man (and here we may glimpse the workings of the universalist tendency of renunciation), and even to every living being. It is this which accounts for all instinctive knowledge found among animals and babies, and all spontaneous behaviour. It is supreme Reality itself—or at least there appears not to be any *Brahman* other than it. It is the stuff of all consciousness, eternal, indivisible, and undifferentiated. It only fragments itself into concrete words, into carriers of distinct meanings, in order to communicate itself outside of a given consciousness. It then manifests itself with the help of audible sounds, called *dhvanis*, which are themselves evanescent.

This innovative and audacious philosophy was not followed in orthodox brahmanic circles, and it was not taken up by Sanskrit grammarians until it had first been appropriated by the Śaivite philosophers of Kashmir. And it is precisely in this context that it came to enrich speculation on poetics. This was due, in essence, to the work of the rasa theoreticians, Ānandavardhana (ninth century) and Abhinavagupta (eleventh century), of which the latter was also known as a tantric philosopher. Abhinavagupta does nothing more than to give a commentary on the work of Ānandavardhana (as well as that of Bharata), and it is Ānandavardhana who borrows Bhartṛhari's vocabulary in order to apply it to poetics. For him, rasa, the emotion experienced by the hearer, has no connection whatsoever with expressed meaning; it occurs in the order of suggestion[4] and, as such, is identical with the *dhvani*, that internal resonance of words from which all temporal sequence has disappeared. Rasa thus takes on an objective consistency, becoming the surplus of meaning proper to sounds, rather than what the hearer

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experiences. Words may express a human emotion, but this is not what rasa produces directly for the hearer. Previously, rhetoricians had concentrated their efforts in establishing inventories of figures of style and of the processes by which poetic language could be generated. With the dhvani theory, rasa arises out of a property of the word not subject to analysis, a property that eludes all process, but one that is related to a certain internal intent on the part of the poet.

However—and here is the second point we wish to make—this is never a case of generating a text's poetic value out of a particular mood, and even less out of an unconscious that is secret and more personal than the conscious and social ego. Every analysis of rasa—analyses which are never connected, moreover, with that which takes place within the hearer — emphasize that which differentiates rasa from ordinary emotion. We feel pleasure when we hear a play or a poem, even when these are describing a hero's sorrows. Characters' happy emotions themselves, most especially feelings of love, that most frequent of themes, are also experienced in a way wholly different from that in which we would directly experience them. We are only able to experience them because they awaken in us the dormant memories of similar personal emotions or feelings—if necessary those of a previous life. Yet, at the same time, all reference to one's self is quashed: each and every one of the spectators may feel the same thing at the same time and, for each of them, the emotion that has thus been depersonalized becomes divested of every spatial or temporal dimension. The compelling drama suspends the passage of time, suppressing concrete circumstances as well as waking memories. This is what the theoreticians of rasa describe as the universalization of emotion: the aesthetic enjoyment obtained through the poetic word is but another case of the dispossession of the self, in which the ego forgets itself in the emotions and feelings represented on stage or in a poem. This is one of the experiences that help an individual to transcend his ahaṃkāra: an analysis of this sort, like that of the act of love, clearly presupposes that the transcendence of the ego is not primarily a question of an ethical order. This has been demonstrated from the outset. We hereby come to understand how the enjoyment of rasa—*rasāsvāda*—can be so easily paralleled with the enjoyment of the *Brahman*—*Brahmāsvāda*. The sudden wonder—*camatkāra*—

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created by dramatic action or verse is felt as an expansion of thought beyond its normal limits, in much the same way as the yogin or mystic (especially in Kashmir Śaivism) instantaneously accedes to an experience, a *camatkāra*, in which he transcends his ego.

The religious implications of this are immediate. In the classification of the different kinds of rasa, it is the rasa of love that is most highly prized, even if Abhinavagupta places greater emphasis on the śāntarasa which, for him, has a direct religious value. As for bhakti, it would also come to use the notion of rasa to typify the (essentially unselfish) feelings held by the bhakta towards the divinity, with the śāntarasa being common to both aesthetics and bhakti. At the same time, the convergence of bhakti on the one hand, and the analysis of love and of aesthetic enjoyment as the dispossession of self on the other, would bring the creation of a very abundant erotico-poetic mysticism of which the celebrated *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva (twelfth century) remains the model. In order that he might better love Kṛṣṇa, it is necessary for the devotee to imagine his love play with Rādhā. The poet offers him a poetic and highly erotic description of their play, which the devotee cannot savour in the same way as he would the love play of any lesser character. This serves to draw him out of himself and to love God for himself. Here, the bhakta takes the place of the spectator.

The Goddess

For methodological reasons, we will begin by turning our backs on the dichotomy—which is taken to be self-evident—that exists between Śrī or Lakṣmī, the consort of Viṣṇu; and Parvatī or Durgā, who is considered to be Śaivite even if she is not always Śiva's wife. We will return to this dichotomy, properly delineated, in due course. We must first, however, establish the place of the deity who is worshipped in her innumerable independent temples, under a wide variety of names, as the Goddess. A second methodological imperative requires that we clearly separate our treatment of this Goddess from the problems posed by that extreme form of tantrism known as śāktism, until such time as we can reiterate the real connections that exist between the great Hindu temples (and not only those of the goddess) and tantric practices.

On the mythological level, we will begin by briefly evoking the

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Goddess's birth legends, without attempting to go back to the origins of such accounts, or to produce an exhaustive list of her appearances. The first known myth of her birth is in fact that of the *Harivaṃśa*, that appendix to the *Mahābhārata* whose explicit aim is to recount the acts of Kṛṣṇa in such a way as to flesh out their epic allusions. At the moment in which Viṣṇu is to incarnate himself in the womb of Devakī in order to become the avatāra Kṛṣṇa, Kaṃsa—who is, of course, an asura incarnate, as well as the son of Devaki's brother—vows that he must die, for it has been fortold to him that Kṛṣṇa would kill him. Viṣṇu asks his sister Kālī (also called Kauśikī, Kātyāyanī, Ekānaṃśa, Nidrā, Vindhyavāsinī, etc.), his divine sister, to incarnate herself at the same time, in the womb of Yaśodā, in order that the two might be exchanged on the night of their birth. This substitution having been effected, Kaṃsa seizes the infant he believes to be Devakī's child, but who is in fact an incarnation of Kālī, and smashes it by striking it against a boulder—a *śilā*. She escapes from him, laughing, and rises up into the sky as she announces to Kaṃsa that his slayer has been born. The role of the goddess is limited to this role (in this part of Kṛṣṇa's biography, at any rate), and it is this episode that is invoked whenever the argument is made that the goddess is Viṣṇu's sister. She is sacrificed in order that her brother might fulfil his role of avatāra against Kaṃsa, and it would be a mistake to see hers as a purely passive role here: at the very least, she is a consenting party in this episode. Here she is a virgin goddess, and the worship that is promised to her in exchange is a bloody worship. More than this, she is attributed the discus and the conch, the weapons of Viṣṇu. It may nevertheless be supposed that she bears a relationship to Śiva's wife Pārvatī, the daughter of Parvata 'the mountain': a synonym for *parvata* is *śaila*, 'boulder, outcropping' and Pārvatī is consequently known as Śailajā, daughter of the Mountain. Here we find an echo of the boulder—*śilā*—upon which Kaṃsa sacrificed the infant and thereby caused her rebirth into her celestial existence.

Without a doubt, the *Devīmāhātmya* (a portion of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*) is a later source, even if a *Mahābhārata* hymn to the Goddess already portrays her as enjoying the blood of the buffalo, and in spite of the fact that the iconography of the goddess as slayer of the buffalo goes back to the second century AD. This contains two juxtaposed birth myths, of which one reiterates her familial ties

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to Viṣṇu, albeit in a different form from that of the *Harivaṃśa*. This time, the setting is purely Purāṇic: Viṣṇu is sleeping on the serpent Śeṣa, who is himself resting upon the waters of the flood. From Viṣṇu's navel there arises a lotus which, when it opens, reveals Brahmā. This god watches, horrified, as two asuras, born from the impurities of Viṣṇu's ears,[5] prepare to attack him. He then begins to invoke Yoganidrā who, inside Viṣṇu, suspends him in his state of 'yogic sleep'—this is the meaning of her name—during the cosmic night. But it is also Yoganidrā who, emerging out of Viṣṇu, awakens him and 'deceives' the creatures: she is the cosmic Great Illusion—Mahāmāyā—who allows beings to exist in a world which believes itself to be distinct from the god. In this case, Yoganidrā awakens Viṣṇu when she emerges from his eyes, and he easily slays the asuras. To this point, the goddess, the still unwed sister of Viṣṇu, limits herself to helping the god in the service of creation. At first blush, the second *Devīmāhātmya* myth is more problematic, since the goddess here seems purely and simply to replace the avatāra in his role as saviour of the social and cosmic order. Her kinship with Viṣṇu dissolves into an all-encompassing bond with the world of the gods in which are counted Viṣṇu and Śiva, but also the Vedic pantheon. Yet, we should not be taken in by these appearances, for the emergence of the goddess is directly subordinated to the war between the gods and the demons, and the king of the demons who must be defeated is Mahiṣāsura, that buffalo demon whose iconography and worship both demand our attention. In this new account, Devī, who is Caṇḍikā ('the Terrible'), Bhadrakālī ('the Black Goddess,' but with a beneficent—*bhadra*—connotation), Mahāmāyā, etc., is formed from a portion of *tejas*, from that fiery and luminous energy that is the intimate stuff of the gods.[6] Their combined *tejas* is fused into a single shining mass which takes the form of the goddess. This is done upon the initiative of Brahmā, who goes to ask for help from Viṣṇu and Śiva against the demons 'in order to perform the work of the gods.' Here again, Devī is in her virgin form, and her privileged relationship with Viṣṇu remains explicit in her name Nārāyaṇī. But here she appears in her full-fledged form as a warrior goddess and an avatāra.

A primary conclusion which must be drawn, on the strength of these myths alone, is that the goddess is not Śaivite in those mythic forms in which she is Śiva's wife and that she is primarily a relative

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of Viṣṇu—though we dare not say of his lineage—in her function as defender of the socio-cosmic order. On the one hand, she helps him and even supplies him with the sort of sacrificial victim he needs in his role as avatāra; on the other, she awakens him as she emerges from his body in order that he might take up the fight against the asuras who threaten Brahmā, the personification of Vedic knowledge and ritual practice. Finally, she also seems purely and simply to take the place of the avatāra in his battle against the asuras. Here, Mahisāsura appears to be the demon who is reserved especially for her,[7] with her function in this case being all that remains of her kinship with Viṣṇu. Across these various scenarios, she remains possessed of a single and unchanging 'nature', one which closely corresponds to the Purāṇic cosmic cycles and to concepts proper to bhakti. Inside the sleeping Viṣṇu, she is his yogic sleep; outside of him she is cosmic Illusion, primordial Nature. In a word, she is the feminine principle as opposed to the Male or to the man—Purūṣa—who is Viṣṇu. We know that the avatāra's mission is to initiate a nearly total destruction of the world, as a means to re-establishing an overturned order; and this is the significance of the role that Kālī must play as victim in the hands of Kaṃsa, the demon incarnate.

The problem that remains here is one of finding a unifying principle for these apparently differentiated functions; also problematic is her role as avatāra, as saviour of the socio-cosmic order in the recurring battle against the asuras. A rapid typologization of goddess temples will enrich the mythic data and allow us to move forward in our search for answers to these questions.

Without completely neglecting the multitude of family goddesses, local goddesses, or goddesses who fulfil special functions (regarding female sterility, various diseases, crossroads, mountaintops, etc.), here we will deal solely with those goddesses whose functions are all-embracing for a given territorial unit, since it is these alone who can help us to delineate the socio-cosmic role of the Goddess. At the humblest level, it is to the tutelary Goddess of a village that we must turn. Athough she does not bear the name of 'village deity'—a name attributed to her on the eastern marches of the Deccan—in all her locations, she nevertheless seems to be found everywhere. She appears in single or multiple forms; and all across India, in the north and south as well, we find the recurring theme of seven sisters, who are grouped together in a single place or who

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distribute their roles across several different villages. At times they may appear in pairs or in groups of three, together in their temples, or divided among separate shrines. What is absolutely characteristic of this form of the Goddess is that her place of worship is always located on the limits of a populated area. As the protectress of a site, she should in fact be found on the border, prepared to challenge the enemy. Of course, in the details of her worship, she is also connected with the centre of the village, that place in which the crucial moments in the life of the group are played out. But she herself is first and foremost the goddess of the boundary—and this is the meaning of one of her names, Ellamma, a name found across the whole of the Deccan. Presently, her festival is in an advanced state of decay, well on the way to disappearing, a phenomenon that may be best understood in the light of the fact that its essential ritual observance, the buffalo sacrifice, is a rite that has been prohibited. In this function, she is always a virgin goddess, in accordance with her mythological description.[8] The enemies against whom she fights, and who are personified by the buffalo demon of myth, are essentially epidemics that afflict man and beast alike, and the droughts or excessive rains that threaten harvests; in short, all that concerns the life of a locale. She is close to her devotees, who know very well that they can turn to her for all that concerns the local prosperity, but nothing more. It would be wrong for us to see in this a 'popular' specialization of the goddess, or a reproduction of her on a village scale. What the villagers ask of her is in fact the shape that dharma—the socio-cosmic order, that well-tempered functioning of the universe in which each village must play its role and take part—will take for them on a local level. The buffalo sacrifice bears witness to the fact that, here too, the goddess is the victorious and consequently the royal warrior of mythic fame.[9]

By virtue of this, it is she whom we find on the scale of the kingdom itself, in the form of the protector goddess of the royal family. Here, she is less of a territorial goddess than she is a divinity of a family lineage; but this is a case of a particular lineage, one which identifies itself with its kingdom and its prosperity. The royal goddess's shrine is generally located in the interior of the royal palace, at the centre of the capital, and only receives worship from the princely family. If her worship is executed properly, the goddess bestows her benedictions upon the king, and thereby upon his

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kingdom, which is itself especially symbolized by the kings's primary wife. But she can also be found on the boundary of the royal territories, where her role is homologous with that of the village protector goddess. Her worship also betrays this homology, since the king presides over Durgā Pūjā celebrations in the same way as does a village chief in his role as the mandatory 'sacrificer' at the local goddess's festival. In both cases, it is likely that the buffalo sacrifice was rigorously observed nearly everywhere in India, even if we cannot prove this irrefutably today. Another possibility is that the royal goddess produces a double of herself. As the protectress of the royal line, she has her temple at the centre of the capital; however, she also bears a relationship to a boundary goddess—often her younger sister—over whose cultus the king also presides. In this light, the capital, inasmuch as it is a centre, becomes the symbol of the entire kingdom. At the time of the autumnal Durgā Pūjā, the festival of the royal goddess includes a ceremony in which the king's weapons are worshipped; and this constitutes the occasion for vassals to renew their allegiance to their lord by their presence. This festival, which culminates in the buffalo sacrifice, marks, at the end of the harvests, the beginning of military expeditions. This period is itself distinguished, in certain places, by the rite of 'crossing the border'. Military operations are thus perceived as passing under the direct protection of the goddess who of course is, here as in the village, a solitary virgin dwelling in her shrine.

Yet, in the great bhakti temples, those belonging to Viṣṇu and Śiva as well as to regional gods who are territorial guardians—gods whose protection, in any case, extends to the entire universe—the goddess is transformed into the wife of the god, and appears to be associated with him, of necessity, in subtle ways which we will undertake to describe. It is at this level, of the great pan-Indian or regional pilgrimage centres, that we find an opposition made between Lakṣmī or Śrī, and Umā or Pārvatī, as the respective wives of Viṣṇu and Śiva.[10] The god himself has, within a single site, an entire complex of shrines in which he appears under different forms. If the grouping is organized on a hillside, an upper temple is almost invariably placed in opposition to a lower one. The upper temple, much less visited than the lower one, contains a 'terrible' or ascetic representation of the god who is without any consort. At the foot of

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the hill, on the contrary, that place to which the god has descended in order to make himself more accessible, he is accompanied by a goddess—a wife, sister or mother—and the devotees come in droves, their hands filled with offerings and their minds filled with hopes and desires. Many are the possibilities for organizing such shrines, and these have varied with place and time. As a general rule, however, we can say that the god and the goddess maintain separate shrines, even when they are found within the same enclosure, as if to remind the devotee that the higher form of the god is an ascetic one. At the same time, it is from the goddess that one expects the most tangible blessings, blessings which bear a relationship to the world in which we live: even when he makes his request to a god, the devotee knows that it is through the channel of the goddess that he has access to him. In the local myths connected with every great temple, one regularly finds the goddess being substituted for the god—or helping him to wield his weapon—in order to kill the demons whom the latter has defeated at the site. It is as if, in order to maintain his ascetic purity and his salvific power, he must be discharged of his 'mundane' and especially his military duties. The divine couple is never truly brought together, apart from the time of their annual processions in which the god and goddess solemnly move through four streets which, forming a quadrilateral, symbolize the Earth. It is at this time that one may hope to gain from them their fullest blessings, for this world as well as for the world beyond.

There exists, however, another spatial configuration of shrines, one encountered too frequently to be passed over without comment, and one which recurs too often to be without significance. This is the case in which, for one reason or another—and many are the myths that account for this situation— the goddess and the god do not inhabit the interior of the same temple enclosure. Sometimes it is the god who has driven off his sinful wife, and sometimes it is the goddess who has refused to follow her lord and master as far as he has wanted to lead her. It is here that the goddess is invariably exiled to the outer confines of the 'Earth', that is, of the locality. It is tempting to see in this, yet again, the goddess in her primary function as guardian of a site; and this in opposition to the god, whose eminent protection extends over the entire universe. There is certainly an intentional complementarity here,

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one that is described in spatial terms. This complementarity undoubtedly translates itself into feelings held by devotees who find themselves unable to address to the god the same prayers as they do to the goddess, even though both are necessary. This bisexuality of the divine is all the more striking when one recalls that the great god of bhakti, in his temple, is most often represented in the form of one of his avatāras; that is, of a warrior who intercedes in order to destroy the demon of a given place. The goddess too is a warrior before all else, a warrior who battles against the buffalo demon and ensures the king his victory: it is possible to see in this the doubling of a single theme, down to its specific variants.

There is a real problem here, one of the tangled webs that Hinduism weaves for us, a conundrum that defies analysis. We therefore do not presume to be providing the last word here; we even have the distinct feeling that we must go much further in our investigations if we are to account for the god-goddess duality in all its dimensions. It is nevertheless possible to clarify the data of this problem, even as we point out the different levels of this complementarity.

At the deepest level, it is obvious that we are once again in the presence of the supreme Puruṣa, the Yogin who is turned toward liberation; and of the primal Nature who emanates out of him and who periodically returns into him to the cadence of the great cosmic pulsations which rhythmically control the divine Yogin. The god of the great pilgrimage temple is—regardless of his name and his myth—the pure divinity, withdrawn into himself, the god of ultimate salvation. Furthermore, his most 'terrible' forms border on being considered improper for worship, so dangerous are they even for the devotees themselves. These are relegated to the most inaccessible of locations, where they are surrounded by all kinds of taboos, and only appeased by the appropriate offerings. As for the god's great temple, it contains Śiva's phallic emblem, which is inserted into the female sexual organ—the *yoni*—for the perpetual procreation of the world. Alternatively, it contains a Viṣṇu who, although he is still lying on his serpent Śeṣa, is waking up, with a little Brahmā seated on the lotus that has grown up out of his navel. Rāma or Subrăhmaṇya is divested of his weapons in his images: often the name of the divinity or his cultic attributes evoke his ascetic form. In short, even though the god is the master of the

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universe of which his temple is the centre, he does not have a direct function as its protector *hic et nunc*. This role is delegated to an inferior god, with Bhairava being the classic territorial guardian or *kṣetrapāla*. The main sanctuary does not presume to represent the god in his supreme form—for such would be a contradiction in terms—but at most suggests his renunciant nature as the final cause of the world. Whence his purity, his exclusively vegetarian diet and his apparent inability, on a local level, to fulfil his function as an avatāra. It is for this reason that the goddess is required to take on various unclean tasks, notably the slaying of mythic demons. Compared to him, the goddess, regardless of her kinship relationship with him, is the whole of this universe, as well as the divinity who ensures its harmonious functioning and its essential order. By nature, she is active, bending to fulfil human needs, and on her guard against the evildoers who threaten her devotees. Vegetarian in theory if such is the case with the god with whom she is associated, she is amenable to certain compromises if the situation can be amended without damaging the purity of the god. At Puri, we find the surprising example of Vimalā, that goddess whose shrine is adjacent to that of Jagannāth, who, on the Eighth Night of Durgā Pūjā, secretly receives a sacrificial male goat through a hidden door. Elsewhere, we find the shrine of the non-vegetarian wife of the god located outside of the enclosure of the pure temple. This carnivorous diet obviously goes hand in hand with her warrior function. In simple terms—which we will develop in greater detail later—she remains foreign to yoga and to any form of asceticism. She is the cosmic manifestation of, and thereby personifies, that phase of the god's yoga in which he returns to a level of empirical consciousness. Here we can understand how she constitutes the devotee's only hope, and why he addresses her with innumerable hymns in which the names which describe all of her aspects form the leitmotiv: she is the Mother of the world—even though she has no children—Mahāmāya, the Great Illusion; Mohinī, 'she who leads astray' (while allowing the world to exist in a form that is distinct from the god himself); Ādiśakti, the Primordial Energy; Mahālasā, the Great Active One, etc.

In another sense, we have seen this complementarity of the god and the goddess described in spatial terms: if the god is the master of the universe, the goddess is more often associated with a determined

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territory, village or kingdom (this latter being in fact represented by the royal lineage or by its capital). Here, appearances can be deceiving: the innumerable temples with liṅga (the phallic emblem of Śiva) most often attribute to that god the name of 'lord—*īśvara* or *nātha*—of such and such a place', and a local myth has him battle with a demon who he has dethroned. This we have already said, in so many words: it is in his form as an avatāra that the supreme god may have a localized shrine attributed to him; but this becomes, *ipso facto*, the centre of the world, by which the god's sovereignty is perceived as limitless. Conversely, the goddess's power of intercession is strictly limited to the territory of whoever presides over her cult. That is, her realm is in fact circumscribed by the power of the goddesses who protect neighbouring localities. This is why the consort of a great god like Viṣṇu or Śiva, cannot, in the strict sense of the word, take on this concrete function. She is obliged to associate herself with the goddess of the place. The relationship between goddess and territory is easy to understand if we remember that the world is not a territory *plus* its inhabitants, but the earth-together-with-its-inhabitants. The whole of a kingdom is called *janapada*, the ground-together-with-its-inhabitants. It is the same symbol that at once refers to the kingdom as both territory and as people; and not even dharma can dissociate the fate of the two facets of this entity. The goddess, she who slays the buffalo demon and who gives victory to the king, is therefore that very Nature in which men have their place and from which they await the satisfaction of their needs. The multifold manifestations of the goddess are at least in part connected to the fragmentation of political power. Elsewhere, the god-avatāra reminds the king that, following the consecration of his power by Brahmans, he is symbolically the universal sovereign.

Finally, we find an ultimate aspect of this bisexuality of the divinity in the complementarity, internal to the Puruṣa, of Viṣnu and Śiva. We should recall that Viṣṇu, who is identical to the Vedic Sacrifice, has not only retained, through this function, a connection to the brahmanic orthodoxy,[11] but that he also bears a properly royal aspect, by which it befits him to wear a kind of tiara. When only one goddess is associated with him, she is always Lakṣmī—Prosperity, the Brilliant and Effulgent One who brings Sacrifice into the world. This alone suffices to place her on the cosmic

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manifestation side of the equation, and to associate her closely with dharma.[12] Often however, and especially in the context of processional imagery, she doubles herself into Śrī (Lakṣmī) and Bhū. In this latter manifestation, she is Earth; and here she is placed to the left of the god, the position traditionally accorded to the wife of the divinity. This serves as a means of integrating Śrī with Viṣṇu—from whom she is in fact inseparable—and to depicting at the same time the relationship between the sacrifice and the prosperity of this world. In theory, Śrī is never alone in her temples; in other words, she is never a virgin goddess. Correlatively, her myths never depict her as a warrior goddess.

We must nevertheless qualify this general statement with two corrective remarks: there do exist in India temples dedicated to Lakṣmī in her twofold role of virgin and warrior, but in these cases she bears the name of Mahālakṣmī. We have already noted, moreover, that she can at times figure among the seven sister guardians of village India. In these two cases, she is always Lakṣmī, and never Śrī; that is, she is undoubtedly that goddess who at once encompasses in herself, both the Earth and its prosperity. But the epic also speaks of a human incarnation of Śrī. This is the princess Kṛṣṇā Draupadī, the common wife of the five Pāṇḍava brothers and the sister of the god Agni, the sacrificial Fire; and here we see that she is not a simple mirror image of Viṣṇu's wife, in spite of her kinship with the sacrificial fire. Black—like the avatāra Kṛṣṇa—she is born 'for the destruction of the Kṣatriyas'; her favourite husband is Arjuna, the incarnation of Nara and the son of Indra, the Pāṇḍava who is closest to Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu and the epitome of the ideal king. Without a doubt, she is not a warrior in the immediate sense of the word, but her quickness to anger and the impatience with which she tolerates her own and her husbands' sorrows stand in marked contrast to Yudhiṣṭhira's boundless ability to forgive and Arjuna's manifest repugnance to the thought of doing battle with his family relations. On the contrary, she gets along famously with hot-headed Bhīma, who is always ready to cross swords, especially when it is to please and avenge her. She is thus an active character in the war. She is unaware of the god's great plan (as is proper for a woman), capable of placing Bhīma in impossible situations, and is the mistress of faulty reasoning—in a word, she behaves as Māyā ought to behave. But when all is said and done, she is categorically

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opposed to seeing herself reduced to slavery by her husbands' enemies, and chooses, once and for all times, the side of dharma. It is thanks to her that the dreaded dice game of Book II is annulled and then begun anew, so as to end with a glimmer of hope for salvation: for is she not ironically hailed as her husbands' saviour, as the raft that is to keep them afloat? It is therefore not surprising also to find, in a part of the Tamil region, temples to Draupadī where, surrounded by her five husbands and Kṛṣṇa, she is nonetheless the temple's principal deity. Her ambiguity is total here: having been carried off by a low caste individual with royal pretensions (she herself is a Kṣatriya), she is nevertheless at no time the recipient of a buffalo sacrifice, or of any animal sacrifice in the strict sense of the word. Her festival ends, however, with a fire walk, which is but one of a great number of substitutes for human sacrifice found in temple worship. We must thus be very careful in speaking about the passivity of Śrī, as opposed to the more active Goddess.

As for Śiva's consort, by whatever name she is known—Pārvatī, Umā, or Rudrāṇī (in the *Mahābhārata* when Śiva is still simply Rudra), or again by some local designation—she is always the goddess, the sister of Viṣṇu who has become the wife of the ascetic god. In this way, the latter becomes Viṣṇu's brother-in-law, a theme which is consciously intimated, in south India at least. This alliance between the god of the Sacrifice and that of Renunciation is not without its consequences for the Hindu concept of the nature of the goddess who seals it. The ferocious warrior—in the *Harivaṃśa*, Viṣṇu names her Kālī, 'the Black One'—who has refused the amorous advances of demons in order that she might place herself in the service of the gods, falls so much in love with Śiva that she even takes up the life of an ascetic to draw his attention, in the hope of making him her husband. With the goddess then, we run the gamut of the entire typology of masculine divinities. Starting with Kālī, wearer of a garland of skulls, naked and black, drunk with blood and alcohol—for she is so portrayed in her famous Kālīghāt temple in Calcutta, with her long red tongue[13]—we eventually come, at the other end of the spectrum, to the pure, vegetarian goddess. Yet, for all this, she remains a single goddess, for she is now Yogeśvarī, the Mistress of Yoga, who rivals with Śiva in her austerities and purity. When she has at last become the wife of the ascetic god, living together or apart from him, she returns to her vegetarian diet, but

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finds herself obliged to subordinate an inferior goddess to herself—in some cases, Kālī—in order to accomplish the bloody tasks that she has renounced.

Interpreting this multitude of the Goddess's forms, as virgin or wife, impure or pure, violent or pacified, now becomes relatively easy. Sociologically, it is generally not the same castes who worship her in all of her forms, and we find among her worshippers the same sort of cleavage as that found in her various depictions. We nevertheless encounter variants that cannot be explained on the simple basis of the general atmosphere of tantrism that obtains in India. So it is that a pure temple, such as that of Cāmuṇḍesvarī, on the hill that dominates the royal city of Mysore (in which we recognize the goddess of boundaries, of whom Cāmuṇḍā is a 'terrible' name) in South India, portrays the Goddess in her shrine in her 'terrible' form as the slayer of the buffalo demon. We can now say that she performs this function in the service of the gods and of dharma. Her cultus, in the hands of the Śaiva Brahmans,[14] is strictly vegetarian inside the temple precincts. But, like the goddess of the *Devī Māhātmya*, Cāmuṇḍeśvarī is attributed a younger sister, whose shrine is a few kilometres away. It is she who, according to the myth, licked up the drops of the demon's blood (therefore her long tongue), and it is also she who receives the buffalo sacrifice each year. This sacrifice is now limited to a very low-caste village; but in an earlier time, it took place *outside* the temple itself, during which time the Śaiva Brahman priests of Cāmuṇḍeśvarī came to stay, *inside* the temple, for two days. Preceding the buffalo sacrifice, which is always a communal affair, the local non-vegetarian castes make individual votive offerings of male goats and cocks. Some of these take place in front of Cāmuṇḍeśvarī's temple itself, on the outside of course, and out of view of the goddess and her priests. Here we can see the infinity of permutations that are possible within her cult, permutations that allow for the establishment of a connection between the pure vegetarian and the impure bloody forms of worship, as well as between high and low castes. This leads us to a more theological level of interpretation, one which doctrinally founds the unity of Hindu society, both in its complexity and in its impeccable ordering. The relationship between high and low castes should first of all be understood in terms of the relationship that obtains

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between Brahmans, a group that has long imitated the renouncer in its concerns for purity, its vegetarian diet and Kṣatriyas. Within caste society, the Brahmans bear living witness to the classic ideal of renunciation, whereas the Kṣatriyas are, in principle and by virtue of their warrior tradition, non-vegetarians, hunters, etc., and are thereby tainted with impurity. Strictly speaking, it would be untrue to present Viṣṇu as the god of Brahmans and Rudra-Śiva as that of Kṣatriyas; yet, there are a good number of cases in which the mythological division is of this order. It would undoubtedly be more exact to say, in spite of all this, that Viṣṇu—who probably first became a yogin in his Nārāyana form[15]—incarnates the proper relationship between the Brahman and the Kṣatriya, a relationship in which each of the two higher varṇas has its privileged function in the sacrifice and in its own appropriate form of renunciation. From the perspective of status, the Brahman's being the higher one, Viṣṇu may appear to be the god of Brahmans, even as his avatāric form sacralises the royal model. In this light, Rudra-Śiva necessarily remains, in spite of his yogic purity, associated with the dangerous aspects of the sacrifice which he symbolizes, and with the forest areas haunted by hunters and outlaws. He is nonetheless the Yogin god *par excellence*, in comparison to the royal Viṣṇu who reigns over dharmic society; and it is he who because of his position, incarnates renunciation in the classical Hindu perspective. The complementarity of the two gods is expressed through their family alliance, which is hypostasized in the Goddess. She is the 'marriage' of secular values dominated by the Sacrifice, and those of renunciation of which Rudra is the incarnation: that is, she is the principle of integration between asceticism and the world, a principle we have seen operating from the outset. The Goddess who transforms herself into an ascetic out of her love for Rudra-Śiva is the perfect symbol of this absorption of renunciation by society. This is the very way in which it is expressed: it is the Goddess who chooses and who wins the good fight, like the great warrior that she is, for her husband. This she does however with the weapons of yoga, while he, withdrawn into himself, long resists her assaults in a state of total impassivity. But it is in his role as Yogin that the Puruṣa emits the worlds in order that he might insert them into the process of liberation—and this is the symbolism of Śiva's phallus (behind which we may glimpse that of the sacrificial post), inserted into the

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female sex organ. With the myth and cultus deciphered in this way, we find a society that continues to be dominated by Brahmans and by the Sacrifice, a society that recognizes the preeminence of the renouncer and which sees itself as being enriched by this ideal. And this society cannot help but recognize itself in and through the goddess.

To this point, we have been able to confine our analysis of the major structures of Hinduism to a unified framework. If this is a matter of locating values and beliefs on a theoretical level, the overarching picture so generated corresponds to yet another practice that is common among the Hindu masses. Here, at pan-Indian and local pilgrimage temples, devotees visit local shrines, where they do not fail to worship the Śiva who is the neighbour of some celebrated Viṣṇu, or vice versa; and who also show their devotion to the guardian goddess of the place, regardless of their caste or sectarian affiliation. Elsewhere, the introduction of bisexuality into godhead does not give immediate rise to a notion of divine sexuality; for the goddess, tied to the world and this-worldly interests, has come to occupy a niche that has been hers alone in the functioning of the pantheon, most especially with regard to the yogin Puruṣa. We should nevertheless note that an important step was taken when the virgin goddess was transformed into the wife of Śiva. In this case, sexuality was introduced within the context of the divine life, as is clearly attested by the presence of the millions of liṅgas that spangle the Indian landscape (even though the great majority of devotees deny the sexual interpretation of this symbol). This notion bears important consequences for the Hindu concept of the divine. To be sure, it is particularly necessary that a connection be drawn between this and the eroticism that displays itself unabashedly in religious art, in temples as well as in popular iconography. The moment has arrived in which we must discuss that which is designated under the generic heading of tantrism. Since the relationship between Viṣṇu and Śrī or Lakṣmī has all in all shown itself to be but minimally sexualized, we might expect a Śaivite dominance in those religious currents which emphasize the masculine-feminine relationship within godhead. And yet . . .

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The divine game

What the classical doctrine and its cultic extensions teach us regarding relationships with the god and the goddess in fact only concerns their relationship with those beings whom they have allowed to fall into empirical existence. When we return to the supreme Puruṣa who is withdrawn into his yogic trance (and it is always to him that we must return if we are to comprehend the apparently disparate facets of Hinduism) we find that the initial impulse which he gives to primal Nature in order to bring the cosmos into a manifest state—as well as his more direct interventions in this world for the restoration of a weakened dharma—do not find sufficient justification. Let us recall the words of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (3.22): 'There is nothing that I have to do in the three worlds, nothing that I have not obtained, nothing that I have to gain; yet I am involved in activity'; and (9.29) 'I am alike towards all beings. There is none who is hateful or dear to me. But those who worship me with devotion (*bhakti*), they are in me and I am in them.' As a yogin, the Puruṣa can have no attachments, and consequently he can have no reason for which to act. Yet it is asserted that he engages himself in cosmic manifestation for the salvation of beings, most especially for the salvation of his devotees. But the manner in which Kṛṣṇa formulates his relationship to the devotee strangely appears to give the initiative to the latter. In fact, the idea that is most impressed upon the Hindu mind is that God creates freely and for no reason, as a form of play. The notion of a divine game—which is still rendered in the Sanskrit by the feminine term, *līlā*—as the origin of this world is not the least bit shocking in a context in which man's sole duty consists in maintaining that which exists through acts that are ritual in origin and essence, with the proviso that he never creates anything new from that which already is. The idea is solidly grounded in the most orthodox of traditions, as indicated by the use which the *Brahma Sūtra* (2.1.33) makes of it, as well as by Śaṅkara's commentary on this *sūtra* in which the creation of the world is specifically explained.[16] It is, correlatively, the source of numerous mythic themes which transpose, with equal efficacy, the terrible (but salutary) acts as well as the blessings of the God, into dances or other forms of play. Each of the great gods has his dance: that of Śiva Naṭarājan, 'king of the

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dance', is renowned. This is a violent and terrible dance in which the god treads upon a demon: here Śiva dances on the worlds that he has just finished destroying. The infant Kṛṣṇa dances on the serpent he has just defeated, a serpent who also represents a demon, perhaps the symbol of the Kali Yuga. He also dances with joy when he has stolen a lump of butter from his mother. Gaṇeśa dances with his enormous paunch and his short legs; and it is perhaps a dancing pose which the monkey god Hanumān strikes when he treads upon another demonic figure, at a much more popular iconographic level. This theme becomes so widespread that a Tamil *Purāṇa*, for example, comes to describe Śiva's manifold incursions into this world as so many games.

Yet, it is rare that the god plays alone. The terrible dance of Śiva itself takes place in the presence of the Goddess. The divine līlā in fact bears immediate relationships to māyā, to primal Nature; and this is inevitable because it also describes the relationship between the god and cosmic manifestation, his 'activity'. When we move from myth to philosophy, the connection between līlā and māyā is also present: the two are often purely and simply identified with one another. God's play is also play with the goddess: to wit, the dice game played by Śiva and Pārvatī, a game in which they indulge themselves in their Himalayan paradise, and from which they will rarely brook disturbance. It is the destiny of the world that is being played out here (the game of dice evoking the succession of the yugas), but it is also a moment of loving intimacy between the god and the goddess: the game is the attention which Śiva lends towards cosmic manifestation, of which the goddess is the very hypostasis.

Nevertheless, it is Kṛṣṇa's bhakti tradition which most abundantly illustrates the theme of play. Kṛṣṇa, in the form of a young flute-playing cowherd, charms his childhood friends, most especially his girlfriends. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (book 10) mentions the cowherding boys (including Kṛṣṇa's older brother, Balarāma), but the cowherdesses are clearly of much greater importance: at first maternal in their love for baby Kṛṣṇa, their love quickly becomes erotic. The *gopīs*—'cowherdesses'—clearly represent his devotees, whose souls experience feelings for Kṛṣṇa that are duly categorized by the bhakti tradition. The legends of his infancy develop—throughout all of the literature recorded in modern languages and especially in north India—in such a way as to allow for a free

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expression of the devotee's 'maternal' feelings. But it is the very erotic love of the gopīs for the young Kṛṣṇa that quickly comes to the fore: already in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* we find a description of the *rāsa līlā*, 'the game (made) of rasa'. We find this literary theme adapted into modern languages, translated into a ritual dance, and commentated by such theoreticians of Kṛṣṇa bhakti as the gosvāmins who were heirs to Caitanya (sixteenth century) in Bengal and in the Mathurā region. In the language of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as well as in the writings of the gosvāmins,[17] we find the subliminal notion of the poetic rasa. This is that 'ultra-mundane'—*alaukika*—aesthetic emotion which causes the individual to leave himself even as it causes him to feel that which all of the other listeners or spectators are feeling along with him. In the play of rasa, Kṛṣṇa dances with all of the gopīs at the same time, so that each of them rejoices in his presence as if she were the only one who was so rejoicing, without jealousy for the other gopīs. In spite of the erotic overtones of the poetry that describes this līlā, the theoreticians of bhakti go to great lengths to explain that this is in no sense a case of human love, but that the love of the gopīs for Kṛṣṇa is a salvific love, a love bereft of egotism or egocentrism, in contradistinction to the kāma of this world, which is *laukika*. Bhakti classifies the rasas of the devotee like the poetic rasas, and if the different schools do not always agree on the names and number of these rasas, the parallelism between the two classifications is nonetheless striking. At the same time, we must emphasize that Kṛṣṇa is himself rasa through and through: so we are not surprised in the least—since he is composed of that bliss which already characterized the *Brahman*, and which is Śiva—to find him replacing Viṣṇu as the supreme form of godhead. Conversely, it is Viṣṇu who becomes an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa. But once more, nothing is lost: the bliss of the *Brahman* exists, but it is inferior to bhakti, with the śāntarasa itself becoming the lowest degree of bhakti.

In the meantime, however, a gopī appears on the scene who is prized above all the others: this is the Rādhā whom the *Gīta Govinda* introduces as Kṛṣṇa's mistress, but with whom the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* seems not to be acquainted. Their loves are stormy: quarrels and reconciliations, separations and reunions, all of which are meant to depict a wholly affective mysticism. Once again, confronted with this character who appears in a poorly

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defined—though relatively late—period of Hindu mythology, attempts have been made to resolve the riddle she incarnates by explaining her existence historically or geographically. The goddess of some tribe (for is she not a cowherdess?), she must have slipped into the pantheon like so many goddesses before her. This is so much conjecture which, more importantly, throws no light upon the matter, since it does not advance our understanding in the least as far as her unique position with regard to Kṛṣṇa is concerned. In fact, the role of this unique gopī appears to become more and more indispensible as bhakti develops into a cult in which the love of God takes on a more and more intimate dimension. Even if every soul knows that it shares the field with sister souls, this nevertheless does not reduce its demand that God be hers and hers alone. This is part and parcel of the rāsalīlā, and it cannot help but bear extreme consequences: Rādhā is the ideal gopī, she whom all the others seek to imitate. The theoreticians of bhakti clearly distinguish the classical bhakti of the *Bhagavad Gītā* from the versions that they follow. The first centres on the execution of prescribed rites, not only the brahmanic rites discussed by Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, but also the complex rites of the great Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite temples which, found all over India, constitute the principal expression of bhakti among mainstream worshippers.[18] In contrast, affective bhakti consists of impassioned attachment—*rāga*—to the divinity. Such a love cannot help but project itself into a love that is sexual, the love of a divine pair: God, the Puruṣa, the Male plays the game of love with a privileged soul which has been feminized.

Rādhā, moreover, is a mistress, and not the legitimate wife of Kṛṣṇa. The most common explanation given for this is, at first blush, somewhat disconcerting: she has to be a mistress in order that the couple might be more certain that the love that binds them is not a banal human love, not a case of mere *kāma*. If the woman were his wife, the husband would be more easily carried away by a self-serving desire for her. This line of reasoning, it must be admitted, does not appear to be entirely convincing; but here again, it is necessary that we locate it in the context of bhakti, which is precisely what the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas argue: the soul is to have an immediate relationship with God, a relationship that is not mediated by dharma, by the accomplishment of rites. It places itself before him stripped of both ornament and merit, without caste or

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family, reduced to its intimate self. A legitimate wife could not symbolize this soul since she, contrariwise, must place between herself and her husband the entire range of dharma, of social rules and requirements. Besides, the husband has a feeling of ownership—of 'mine', *mama*—towards his wife, a sentiment which favours the development of ahaṃkāra rather than its transcendence. The reciprocal love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is entirely divested of this self-centredness. Each is attentive to the happiness of the other and nothing else. Once again, the religion of secular life, dharma, is visualized as kāma, and kāma is the direct expression of ahaṃkāra. This was as it will be recalled, the judgment passed by the renouncer on a world fallen prey to ahaṃkāra—and this condemnation was a still wholly negative way of expressing the universality of salvation: salvation cannot be limited to or by considerations of dharma. Vyāsa, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, draws his own conclusions from this as he boasts of the benefits of the Kali Yuga, the joy of Śūdras and women. We have seen how bhakti has constantly been torn—due to its rootedness in brahmanic society—between a wish to preserve orthodox values, and a desire to build a broader cosmos. Such an enlarged cosmos would include everything that considerations for dharma would have ruled out as means to salvation. The bhakti of love, such as it presents itself in the 'extra-legal' couple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, is an outcome of this latter perspective.

But in this case, Rādhā is not a goddess like all other goddesses: rather than depicting Nature, she represents the individual soul; and for this reason she cannot bear the same relationship to māyā as do other goddesses. The game of love profoundly affects the masculine divinity, to the point that it is no longer a game that he plays. Kṛṣṇa's lover belongs to the level of absolute reality. She belongs to the god's very being, inasmuch as he is rasa, and inasmuch as this rasa is typologized according to the relationship that obtains between man and woman. The love that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa feel for each other is called *preman* rather than *kāma*, as a means to distinguishing it more clearly from the human love which it appears to imitate. The goddess, in those forms in which we have seen her to this point, is located on a plane of reality that cannot be the highest plane.

At this juncture, what separates bhakti from tantrism?

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Tantrism

The question is in fact a twofold one, and the answers are not easy: in what way is that which we call 'tantrism' to be theoretically distinguished from bhakti, and why does there exist an entire area of religious phenomena in Hinduism which one would hesitate to list under either heading? The very choice of the term 'tantrism' is not as helpful as it might be, even if it follows a usage proper to the Sanskrit texts themselves. It comes from the name *Tantra*, which technically designates a certain category of works, of which there are a great number, and whose dating is at least as variable as that of the *Purāṇas*. At the same time, the *Tantras* themselves refer to certain texts which are considered to be revealed sources: these are the *Āgamas*, a term with Śaivite overtones, and the *Saṃhitās*, which are proper to the Vaiṣṇavites. This Revelation, originating from the divinity, is often placed in opposition to the Vedic Revelation which bhakti continues to claim for itself. And because tantric ideas are in fact as absent from Vedic literature as are those of bhakti, the notion of a popular, non-Aryan, current of thought surfaces once again. So, by virtue of the 'primitive' practices contained in it, tantra is provided with an ancient pedigree; and this in spite of the fact that the texts at our disposal never predate the common era. However, because of its very strong implantation into North Indian Buddhism, one is more inclined, in the search for its roots, to look in the direction of central Asia and its various shamanic cults, than in that of the Dravidians.

To be sure, a definition of tantrism that would limit itself to calling it anti-Vedic—and, by the same token, extra-Vedic—would be most awkward. Such would in fact force one, from the outset, to deny the possibility of coming to terms with the tensions that are as inherent to tantrism as they are to bhakti, tensions that divide it into practices reserved for the lower castes, and other practices with which the higher castes must content themselves in order to remain true to their dharma and not lose their status. By adopting such a perspective one would also fail to see, within the tantric systems themselves, practices which reflect the same fundamental notions as found in the rest of Hinduism. This common structure, which is identical down to its very details, is totally shaken by any other approach.

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Bhakti appeared as a new reading of Vedic Revelation and of its most narrow brahmanic interpretation, a reading in which the world of desire came to be rehabilitated in its relationship to salvation. But this was effected at the expense of desire itself: all of the ends of man—including kāma—are good, but all must be subordinated to mokṣa. The king, that man most vulnerable to desire in all its forms, gains the promise of liberation on the condition that he break the bond that binds his acts to his personal interests or proclivities. The happiness of the worlds and the abandonment of self to the god of salvation must replace kāma and all of the egocentrism that flows from it. In fact, when the goddess enters into the life of the god, it is none other than the sensitive and pivotal position of kāma that is altered within the Hindu universe. Even when we take the added precaution of making a special case for the love of Kṛṣṇa for Rādhā, or between Śiva and his Śakti, by designating it with a new term, kāma remains very much present to the union of the pair, since without it the union could not be consummated. It is impossible to filter it out from the creative act itself, since the goddess is the principle to which the Puruṣa is opposed, both for the generation of the cosmos, and for the act of procreation. On the other hand, since the Puruṣa himself remains immobile and withdrawn, it is his feminine 'half' that is the active principle at work in the universe. It is therefore not surprising—whatever its undefinable historical origins—that the same goddess, the maker of creation and consequently of the world of kāma, also came to be considered, at some point in time, as the essential agent for the return to the Puruṣa, for liberation, the expressed end of the work of creation.

We speak of tantrism when this reversal in perspective is formulated in its most rigorous sense, regardless of the shape its realization takes. The world exists, as a given, with its existence tied to kāma; and it is the fate of kāma itself to ultimately return to the Absolute from which it was originally emitted. Rather than placing desire and liberation in opposition to each other, and rather than denying the one to the benefit of the other, the theory holds, quite to the contrary, that desire is the hallmark of each and every individual's initiation into the path of salvation. It is the seal of the divine in man, so long as he is schooled in the proper techniques for its transformation. It is therefore no longer one's acts, ritual or otherwise, that are valorized as such; rather, it is desire itself which

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is actually positively re-evaluated; and this change occurs, as always, from the starting point of a modified concept of godhead. If, in most cases, the Absolute in its ultimate form continues to be the Puruṣa into which all—including its feminine Energy or Śakti—is reabsorbed, then the god of the manifest cosmos cannot help but be united with this Śakti in a permanent and happy union. The divine takes the form of a couple, the analogue of the human couple and, conversely, no man—or woman—can approach the divine unless he or she seeks to reproduce this primal couple in him or herself.[19] In this way, the divine couple's happiness as well becomes the analogue of human kāma, even if it is bereft of all the limitations of the former. In practical terms, these doctrines are distinguished from one another by the greater or lesser importance that they attribute to the goddess. Śaktism is the extreme form of this process, wherein the goddess becomes the supreme universal principle. Iconographically, she is portrayed as a black, naked goddess, wearing a necklace of skulls, who stands astride the pale corpse of a recumbent Śiva (who is recognizable by his ascetic's tiger skin). This is the Kālī of Ramakrishna, the late nineteenth century Bengali mystic.

If we are to understand the directions in which the tantric ideal was sought, we are obliged, it seems, to take this glorification of amorous love—of that ground for all forms of desire—as our starting point. This is because tantrism offers the seeker a nearly infinite number of paths to follow, in a context in which the symbolic is more triumphant than ever, in which the role of dharma is reduced to a secondary position (with qualifications that will be discussed below), and in which the usual objects of desire become so many paths to realizing true happiness. The tantric universe is an exploded universe, one in which sects hold sway, in which models are skewed by the omnipotence of the guru, and in which the spectrum of possible options strangely corresponds to the caste hierarchy. Here we can do no more than attempt to grasp the broad behavioural categories through which tantrism is defined. We should not be surprised here to find the great themes of Hindu bhakti (with their valences reversed), and behind these, those of brahmanic renunciation. Tantrism innovates nothing—all it does is to appropriate known values in a reverse fashion, by re-reading Tradition through an esoteric lens. We will not stress the properly

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theoretical aspects of tantrism here, even though it is interesting to note the parallelism that exists between Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite developments. In every case, the stages of evolution and involution of the real are multiplied with such a baroque proliferation of grades and levels, that one wonders to what they could have corresponded in the minds of their creators. The Purāṇic cosmogonies reappear, but here they are enveloped in several layers of supplementary categories, added from above and from below.

The first direction into which tantric speculation developed, and that which is striking to even the most distant observer, is that of its manifold ritual; for was it not this in particular that the brahmanic renouncer was obliged to abandon when he withdrew himself from human society? For him, ritual belonged to the universe of kāma and rebirth, quite nearly the converse of salvation. Now it appears promoted—as a specifically privileged case of kāma—to the venerable level of an instrument for self-realization in the presence of the divinity. From the outset, this is a private daily ritual in which we find echoes of brahmanic ritual; but here they are infinitely complicated, with external forms equated with mental states. Whether one installs the divinity upon a diagram drawn on the ground with coloured powders or whether one invokes it in an imaginary setting, one always begins with the invocation of the god within. One cannot worship a god unless one is already consubstantial with him or her: in other words, one offers worship to oneself. Temple ritual is by far the most spectacular, and we cannot help but admire the technical knowledge of priests who specialize in worship, especially in those regions where tantrism is most vital (Bengal, the coastal plain to the southwest of the Deccan, etc.), however vertiginous they may be to watch. The meticulousness of the rites and their multiplicity are such that their execution, according to the priests themselves, has to be altered for reasons of time—and this in a country in which everyone, in day to day life, seems to have all the time in the world! Every gesture, every ingredient, every formula, every movement through space bears a symbolic meaning which the initiate alone is capable of perceiving. In spite of the references made by certain temple priests to the Veda, and their claim to use so-called Vedic manuals—even though Vedic worship was never performed in temples—we may summarily say that the cultus of the great Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite temples is, to

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varying degrees, and more so than that of the goddess's temples, tantric. The Hindu collective consciousness is unaware of this because its devotees, as we have said, generally have no connection whatsoever with the particular tantric sects to which their temple priests subscribe. On the other hand, for the specialist in Hinduism, tantrism primarily appears as ritualism gone amok, and this to such a point that he is unable to recognize it once he leaves his own area of research. In fact, the difference between regions is often but one of degree or, currently, one of degeneration due to historical conditions. Nonetheless, to speak of tantrism in the context of the small temples of the village boundary goddess is out of the question; and this is a sign that tantric practice continues to be accompanied by a certain refinement in knowledge, and correlatively by a certain social position, which village shrines cannot offer.

This notion of a level below which we should not speak of tantrism, is made all the more important by the fact that tantric worship includes, nearly of necessity, offerings of sacrificial animals and alcohol to the goddess (both being justified by the *Devī Māhātmya* myth), even when the priests belong to the higher castes. Any number of permutations is possible, from votive sacrifices of water buffalo and goats in front of the temple — together with offerings of blood and alcohol brought into the sanctuary along with the severed head of the victim—to sacrifices, performed at a good distance from the temple, which are offered to those lower forms of the deity who serve as mediators between her and her devotee. If the phenomena are complex, the underlying principle appears to be simple: the consumption of meat and alcohol is strictly prohibited by brahmanic forms of Hinduism, in which the model of the renouncer, together with that of ahimsā, holds sway. Correlatively, worship of the gods is vegetarian for high caste Indians, with only inferior gods receiving blood sacrifices. So, for example, a subordinate god, ranked among the demons, is portrayed together with a dog (the hunter's companion) and a pot of palm wine. Tantrism, on the contrary, theoretically recommends offerings of flesh and alcohol, offerings that are to be ritually consumed by the god's devotees. What happens in practice corresponds quite exactly to the two-tiered situation that obtains across all other forms of Hinduism. For example, in the highly tantric area of Bengal, the Brahmans with the highest status offer

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vegetarian worship to the goddess, whom they call Vaiṣṇavī. These Brahmans even refuse to consume fish, a practice which is nearly normative in upper caste Bengali society. More specifically, their tantric worship replaces the animal victim by a symbolic vegetable victim—generally a variety of pumpkin or squash—which the Goddess is happy to accept as a substitute for meat. This is due to the social status of her devotees. The problematic remains constant here, save for the extreme case of Śāktism in which the Goddess openly covers herself and her priests with every sort of impurity: but here her followers are located at a relatively low level in the social hierarchy. Finally, it is the membership (or lack thereof) of priests in a tantric sect, and the initiation they would have undergone to this end, which most clearly distinguishes one tantric cult from another. The devotees themselves are not tantrics unless they have received the first degree of initiation into the sect, in which cases their sectarian duties are formulated in accordance with their caste affiliations. This essentially sectarian character of tantrism has undoubtedly played a crucial role in the coexistence of a Buddhist tantrism together with Hindu tantrism.

The same considerations hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for the sexual practices that are integrated into either ritual or yogic exercises; and it is these that have given tantrism its reputation in India as well as abroad. In this sphere too, variety is the order of the day, encompassing private practices, collective rites (as in the Kaula sect of Kashmir), and the use of temple prostitutes which was once current throughout India. All the same, the number of people who continue to observe such practices is very small. This is the case in spite of the comprehensibility of these within the logic of tantrism, where they transgress normative prohibitions and allow for varying degrees of personal aptitude. Sexual intercourse with a woman other than one's wife is considered to be of a higher order (as with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa) in the hierarchy of practices because it requires a greater degree of self-control. This is accompanied by variant practices which constitute real feats; for example, the reabsorption through the penis of sperm that has been ejaculated into the vagina of one's female partner. The glorification of kāma thus does not exclude rigorous asceticism.

In a general sense, while the tantric yogins emphasize the body and its sexuality, they do so in a wide variety of ways, with the

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history of their sects being marked by an unending series of schisms, and by the divergences in beliefs and practices. It comes as no surprise to find all-powerful symbolic substitutes being used on a regular basis. It is in this way that an entire spectrum of yoga comes to be based upon the idea of the *kuṇḍalinī*, of the sexual energy that is found in its latent form in every individual, and which is represented by a coiled serpent residing in the area of the sex organs of the human body. Here, the aim of yogic exercises is to bring the animal to an erect position, and to cause it to rise, level by level and in accordance with the physiological symbolism proper to yoga, up to the top of the head or to a predetermined place in the body. Whatever its location, this is the locus in which the encounter with the Absolute, the realization of the perfect union of Śiva and Śakti, occurs. Here too, any number of gradations is possible, with the levels being increased to an infinite degree, and the passage from the visible 'gross' world to the subtle world being ensured by dint of equally innumerable transitions. From the outset, there is a remarkable concern for the correspondence between the human microcosm and the macrocosm, one that reappropriates the idea that the individual ought to reproduce the cosmic Puruṣa within himself. At the height of its complexity, this system renders vain any attempt to establish correspondences. With yoga, just as with ritual, an external observer—one who is necessarily uninformed—is struck by the feeling that the machine has gone out of control. But this should not hinder us in our search for the meaning of the fundamental symbols these systems put to use. These are probably no more gratuitous than the rest. Here we will only pause to observe the famous Kuṇḍalinī, sexual energy in the form of a serpent. As we have said, her name means 'she who is coiled.' Now, in Sanskrit, this term has a direct synonym, the compound *bhoga-vatī*: *bhoga* (a term derived from two different radicals) at once means curvature or coiling (of the serpent, for example), and all that pertains to the sphere of sensory experience, most especially to sexual pleasure—a wonderful ambiguity for lovers of cryptic language of the order of that which we find in the *Tantras*. At the same time, we can see how the Kuṇḍalinī, substituted for the too obvious bhogavatī, might serve as the epitome of kāma—of a kāma elevated to the dignity of human substance itself—and how the form of a coiled female serpent might be applied to it. As an added

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bonus, we also find, like some distant echo, a supplementary reference to the serpent Śeṣa, the Remainder of the worlds coiled upon the waters of the deluge where he serves as Viṣṇu-Nārāyana's couch. Decidedly, we have never left the Indian world.

Lastly, we should count among the innovations proper to tantrism the importance accorded to monosyllabic formulae and to the symbolism of phonemes. The tantric construction of the universe already accords a privileged status to sound, such that the stages of the evolution and involution of reality are echoed by symbolic acoustic equivalents—equivalents which no one seems to care about justifying. Subsequently, ritual wildly expands the role of these spoken formulae together with the phonemes, which are traced on diagrams: the mental world created by yogic meditation also complements these diagrammatic figures (geometric shapes, lotus flowers, etc.) with letters that are inscribed in them. Each formula, each letter or sound, is a symbol; and the mental microcosm is thus seen to be as twofold in nature as is the macrocosm emitted by the divinity. At the same time, these formulae constitute protective elements, with their phonemic inscriptions serving to make manifest one or another form of the divinity. Are we not to see in all of this acoustic material, which so permeates the entire gamut of tantric beliefs and practices, an echo of brahmanic speculations on the Veda and on the ritual omnipotence of well-pronounced formulae? To be sure, the content of the Veda has disappeared here, shattered into its atomic elements. But when we witness, at the dawn of the emanation of the cosmos, the rising of Sound in the form of a single point (the graphic inscription of the nasalization of the Vedic *Oṃ*), we are strongly tempted to relate this to Śabda *Brahman*, to *Brahman* in the form of Sound—this being the lesser form of the brahmanic Absolute which certain Upaniṣads placed alongside the supreme *Brahman*. On this point as well, tantrism does nothing more than amplify, *ad delirium*, a genuinely brahmanic current of thought. While this is a strange way of saying no to the Veda, it is undoubtedly the most subtle of all of the Indian ways to glorify kāma.

Tantrism and bhakti

It may be that we have come, in this all too short introduction to

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tantrism, to the elements of an answer, or of the beginnings of an answer, to the question that was posed at the outset. Although tantric theory clearly distinguishes itself in its most general aspects from bhakti, and although it seeks to deepen this cleavage through a reversal of brahmanic values in practice as well as in a broad range of its religious literature, the gap is in fact a very small one. We find tantric themes in the *Purāṇas*, and references to the *Purāṇas* in the *Tantras* as well as authors who write commentaries on both bodies of literature. The great *Purāṇas* are read in temples in which the ritual is said to be tantric, but in which the majority of worshippers are mainstream Hindus who come to the temple with a very vague notion of the meaning of ritual or even of the iconographic representation of the god, and would never dream of taking initiation into a tantric sect. It is this gap in particular which accounts for the refusal by the majority of Hindus to recognize the phallic symbolism of the liṅga. For them, it is merely that form in which they are used to having their *darśan*—their 'vision'—of Siva, and the question of the image's meaning is one they never think to ask. They would reject, with horror, any suggestion of a phallic cult. For them, the liṅga is, on the contrary, the most basic, the most austere representation of Śiva—one in which a Brahman of Śaṅkaran tendencies, for example, might see the symbol of the formless, attributeless *Brahman*. At the level of these great temples, the fact that the Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite saints found there are pure bhaktas, eclipses tantrism all the more. Tantric iconography itself performs the same task as did bhakti with regard to Vedic Revelation: they incorporate rather than exclude whatever elements they cannot leave untouched. So it is that Śiva's liṅga, when it is not "self-generated" (that is, not constructed, but simply occurring as a natural rock outcropping) includes, beneath its vertical cylindrical portion, a square base which portrays Brahmā and an octogonal medial segment that is Viṣṇu. It is thus the Purāṇic Trimūrti (see p. 100) that is reproduced in the liṅga. Śiva is naturally taken to be superior here, as he who gives benefits in this world as well as liberation from it: Viṣṇu is subordinate to him, but Brahmā, and therefore the Veda, supports the entire structure. At the same time, a goddess as tantric as Tārā, 'the Saviouress', is 'made of *Brahman*', while another, Tripurasundarī was once the object, it is said, of worship by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and the thirty-three (Vedic) gods.

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We could go on forever in citing examples of this sort.

Lastly, do hymns of praise and accounts that glorify the god belong to the sphere of bhakti or to that of tantrism? Any attempt to delineate the two would be absurd, since both are indifferently used by bhaktas and tāntrikas alike. They merely serve to confirm the idea that temples are the meeting place between bhakti and tantrism. In effect, it is in the temple that these two aspects of Hinduism exhibit the goals that both hold in common: not to sacrifice this world to the ideal of liberation, but somehow to integrate it into the perspective of salvation. For the bhakta, worship born of the heart ought to accompany that of ritual gestures and speech in an attitude of total disinterest. For the tāntrika, the externals of worship are but a first step towards a transformation of the total person, body and soul, one which will lead him to a divine plane of existence. In both cases, the welfare of the worlds is as much in play as is the final salvation of every individual.

At the same time, we are warned against going too far in our fusion of these twin paths in the search for salvation, paths which by all rights ought to be kept separate—and here, we may even return to the couple of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa who first gave rise to our question. The very emotional bhakti expressed in the *Gīta Govinda* and in a great many texts of the Kṛṣṇa tradition, in both Sanskrit and modern languages, and that form of which Caitanya's successors became the theoreticians, is still very much a form of bhakti. If the latter feel that Caitanya 'realized' the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in himself, this is primarily because they see him as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. But they themselves can only be spectators in the love play of the divine pair. They are the other gopīs who rejoice in Rādhā's ecstasy of love without being able to aspire to take her place. The union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa thus depicts, yet again, the mystic union to which every individual should aspire, the mystic union that constitutes salvation. The case of the Sahajiyās of Bengal, perhaps heirs to a tantric Buddhist sect that survived in this marginal Indian state, is altogether different. Each member of the sect, according to its adherents, is called to realize within himself the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa; and since this is a case of a sect in which the tantric ideal has greatly deteriorated, the kāma of the common man is extremely close here to the tāntrika's act of love. The two are considered to be

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practically identical. Rādhā ends up being more important than Kṛṣṇa: therefore this is in fact a form of Śāktism, in which every woman is Rādhā in person.

From this standpoint, we might even hypothesize on her name, which distinguishes her from Srī or Laksmī as well as from the wives of Kṛṣṇa. It is interesting that this hypothesis originates in that compendium of classical bhakti, the *Mahābhārata*. The epic in fact knows of another Rādhā, who is promised, to be sure, a future less glorious than that of her namesake, but one which is nevertheless significant. This is the wife of the Sūta (a mixed caste born from the union of a Kṣatriya and a Brahman) who adopted the eldest son of Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas. Kuntī had in fact—previous to her marriage with Pāṇḍu—a first son, whom she had abandoned in order to escape dishonour, in spite of the fact that the child's father was the god Sūrya, the Sun. Karṇa, this illegitimate son, would become the bitter enemy of the Pāṇḍavas—who remain unaware of his birthright—and especially of Arjuna, the ideal warrior. Now Kuntī, in the epic, is the incarnation of the goddess Siddhi, Success, Completion, the Realization of one's aim. *Rādhā* is almost a synonym of *siddhi*. The text, then, by designating Karṇa as 'the son of Rādhā'—Rādheya—obliquely indicates his kinship with the recognized sons of Kuntī, the Kaunteyas. In this light, Rādhā the lover of Kṛṣṇa may well symbolize the very essence of tantric worship—*sādhana*—or its practitioner, the *sādhaka*, who strives towards that goal that will make him a *siddha*, a 'perfected one' who has realized within himself the union of the god and his Śakti. In her, we again find the twofold stain of illegitimacy—arising both from the birth of Karṇa and from the mixed caste of the epic Rādhā—together with her status as a cowherdess which, analogous to that of the young Kṛṣṇa, symbolizes the care of cows so dear to the Brahman.

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CHAPTER 5
Hinduism and the Future

Have we remained true to the wager of sorts that we proposed at the beginning of this study, that it is possible to recover, from beneath the infinite diversity Hinduism has to offer, a first glimpse at a deeper unity? To be sure, we nowhere find any sort of institutionalized unity which, superimposed upon this field of research, orders the whole in some explicit fashion. But we must not confuse the institutional with the structural. The religion that issued out of the Vedic Revelation, having never had a centralized organization, became fragmented into major movements, and then into sects that are today difficult to enumerate. Every 'saint' is a potential founder of a new religious group, but this did not cause us the slightest problem in our effort to generate an overview of the tantric sects. But does this make the task—of bringing to light, out of an extreme superficial diversity, a deeper holistic unity—all the more problematic? Not a single one of these religious movements, and none of these sects, can be made intelligible outside of its Indian, that is, its brahmanic and Hindu, context. It is obvious that the presence of numerous Brahmans, who were both sufficiently disseminated geographically to be different—yet bound closely together by their priestly status and their connection to the Revelation—was determinative. They asserted their ways of seeing, in speculations that quite often led them to integrate into their worldview religious discoveries which they might well have done without. Let it suffice here to say that these Brahmans, even as they retained their theoretical status and functions (could they, any more than any other Hindu group, have done otherwise?), were honest people who shaped their religion themselves. This they did together with others, along a given line or given lines, in order to give it greater depth and universality. At no time do we sense, behind this work, the lower castes exerting their pressure. More often, the case is quite the opposite: the Brahmans generate, from within their own perspective, those means by which the lower castes might assert

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themselves over and against them, most particularly on a religious plane.

For the speculation was, nearly always, of an essentially religious nature. This is not to say that all of the dimensions of human life were not explored, as I have attempted to show; rather, they were approached from within the sacred universe. The most secular, even the most empirical sides of the human condition were optimally considered by virtue of the simple fact that they were taken to be indissoluble parts of this sacred universe. At no time did an external source of reflection—from a non-religious perspective—come to shake the ideological citadel of the Brahmans. Those that were introduced over the centuries, and which certainly were a stimulant (but we know not to what extent) to brahmanic speculations, were also of a religious order. These were essentially Buddhism, a tradition that Hinduism would come to reabsorb in India; Jainism, which Hinduism confined to 'reservations' of sorts; and Islam, against which brahman orthodoxy would brace itself in a last hurrah. We have seen, however, how scientific thought, contrary to this development in the west, never laid the groundwork for its own emancipation. It is especially striking to see that the same concrete examples are invoked, indefinitely, throughout the entire history—a history nearly two thousand years old, if we are to judge by the texts we possess—of Nyāya, the Indian school of logic, and throughout that of the associated Vaiśeṣika school as well. The same lines of reason are taken up again and again, and are only refined to the end of responding better to the objections to which they give rise. The history of the mathematical sciences has most certainly enshrined powerful intellects capable of innovation, and capable of contributing to the world history of this discipline (they are credited in particular with the invention of the positional zero). However, apart from the fact that the socio-religious context did not encourage scientific research that exceeded applications to immediate needs, the Indian concept of the human mind allowed neither for great theoretical innovation, nor for the reform of reigning perspectives.

In a similar vein, India's history is a history that exists in spite of itself. There is no element of traditional thought that allows for an understanding of things as really occuring in the world. This is

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because man is, from the outset, conceived as having no other function than that of maintaining the cosmic order. It follows then that human life on earth, taken as a whole, cannot be oriented towards any but a predetermined specified goal, a goal which lies outside of man himself. Under the impact of renunciant ideals, human activity comes to be more and more analysed in religious, and even ritual terms. It is as if the Hindu universe has become more and more sacralized, in such a way as to definitively empty human existence of any meaning other than that of a perfect integration into a transcendant whole. It is the universe that gives human existence its meaning, and not the opposite. The concept of a cyclic time within which all, apart from a few liberated souls, returns perpetually, bears a logical connection with this anthropology. Regardless of what one does, the end of the world cannot help but come; however, this is but a pause which illustrates, at the level of godhead, the superiority of yogic concentration over any externally oriented activity. At the same time, the very perpetuity of the cosmic rhythm implies that he who lives in the world is bound to it, even if there is no good reason for his being there.

We cannot imagine a more total negation of that which constitutes, on the whole, our own modern western ideology. The implicit assumption of the western mind—that its life and acts have meaning, and that the world is possessed of a unique history in which it participates—is one which appears, to Indian eyes, to be myth. And it undoubtedly is one, just as much as is the Hindu perspective, but it is one that engages us, in our worldview, in a quest for solutions to immediate human problems—problems that are, moreover, often of our own making. In this way, we can understand how India has come to be the chosen land for those westerners who, finding themselves ill at ease in a world that places too many demands on them and that diverts them from the care of their ātmans, have rejected their own culture. On the other hand, we can see just as well how much our modern ideology is heir to Christianity: personal 'salvation', even if it is nothing more than giving some meaning to a life limited by birth and death, is effected through the others and through objective works, which the others will integrate in order to further them. This capacity of the brahmanic ideology to provide us with the possibility of stepping

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back from our own assumptions, even if only as a means to endorsing them on the basis of a more complete knowledge of them, is no small merit.

Yet, conversely, the West thrusts itself upon India, whereas India merely offers its viewpoint to the West. This is, for India, the crucial problem of the hour, one that has lain just beneath the surface of its every historical event since nearly the beginning of the nineteenth century. We are not attempting to prophesy here, but rather to bring together the necessary elements for as lucid a diagnosis as possible. At the same time, we leave for some future time the task of providing a definitive diagnosis—an *a posteriori* one, since such is always the case in history—for we have not yet completed our survey of human resources.

We should first note—since we have emphasized the West's responsibilities in the present situation—that the occupation of India by the Europeans in the eighteenth century, followed by the British triumph, did not put a stop to a growing and vital civilization. The political decomposition of the country in this period, considerably heightened by the presence of Muslim rulers alongside their Hindu counterparts, is not the final word on the conquest of India. For one who has studied Hinduism through the ages, together with the history of ideas to which it gave rise, the ossification that occurs after the disappearance of Buddhism (in about the twelfth century) and following the arrival of the Muslims, is inevitable. Masked for a brief moment by the anti-Islamic brahmanic renaissance that the Vijayanagara empire (from the fourteenth century onwards) patronized, or by the lightning rise of the Maratha empire, this stagnation was woven into the very texture of a culture that had reduced itself to rehearsing its own truisms, and to polemicizing incessantly in the name of an orthodoxy that each school claimed for itself alone. But is not every civilization mortal?

Long before the arrival of the Europeans, and even before the first appearance of the Muslims in the north, India located itself in the Kali Yuga. It continues to do so. It would therefore be vain to imagine the great period of classical Hinduism—corresponding more or less to the Gupta Age, around the fifth century AD—as a kind of golden age in which dharma would have been universally respected, and the social order faultless. The most ancient of the

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treatises on dharma already provide for all kinds of substitutes for especially burdensome high caste duties. Giving to Brahmans—or to wandering religious mendicants—ends up being the panacea for whatever is lacking. The possession of a cow is the symbol of piety; that is, of respect for the brahmanic order—and here we should specify that the raising of its calf, which implies the sacrifice of at least some part of the mother's milk, is mentioned as a feature of the golden age, which says a lot about practices in the Kali Yuga. Even today, we find innumerable substitutes for the pitfalls of visiting temples, substitutions that destroy sins and produce merit. The Porbandar (birthplace of Gandhi) temple of Sudāma alone—consecrated to the poor Brahman upon whom Kṛṣṇa, as the exemplary Kṣatriya, bestowed great riches,[1] provides us with two examples. The temple courtyard is filled with cows, which seem to be thriving, and with sellers of handfuls of grass that devotees purchase to feed to the cows. In the same courtyard, we find a curious labyrinth, built on a slightly elevated platform and consisting of a continuous double wall just a few inches high. It is moreover impossible to lose one's way in this labyrinth: to arrive at the exit, it suffices to enter at one end and to follow the narrow way that is closed in by the double low wall. Here we see women, preceded or followed by even their youngest children, doing their utmost to patiently follow the path, with eyes fixed on the ground and mouths achatter. What is the meaning of this? This is an exercise in concentration, in attentiveness, an 'equivalent' of yogic concentration! In a more general sense, salvation through bhakti—which has never lost its deep-rooted relationship to renunciation in the Hindu consciousness—has given rise to structures which, while extremely complex in theory, are hardly arduous in practice. These include pilgrimage to the protector god of one's lineage and affiliation with a guru who is the member of a sect but who need not be a renouncer himself. The guru is generally hereditary, and one's choice in gurus is determined by the caste to which one belongs. In theory, he visits the disciple family once a year, and this is an occasion for them to shower him with gifts. To this may be added staying at an ashram as a show of one's individual piety.

So it goes in the Kali Yuga, an age in which salvation, as Vyāsa said long ago, is the easiest to realize. There is a flexibility within dharma, and—so to speak—a certain law of the path of least

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resistance that allows one to fall back on less onerous practices when such is the order of the day. And this is perhaps the means by which it has managed to stand up nearly indefinitely to all that has directly opposed it: to wit, the invasion of a modern civilization centred on work, production, and profit. The fact that practices proper to dharma appear to be deteriorating does not necessarily imply that mental attitudes are changing. On the contrary, it is through this very reduction in external requirements, and through the search for adequate substitutes for them, that Hindus always find a way to sustain themselves without placing their lives and practices in question.

Obviously, there are many cultivated, high caste Hindus who are preoccupied with the future of their religion, and their analyses are most relevant here. It is said, for example, that the caste system is dying out, but that Hinduism is not bound to the caste system. In theory, the absolute *Brahman* or the supreme Puruṣa is, in effect, beyond caste distinctions; and this is precisely what the revealed texts themselves have tried to teach from the very beginning. It is also true, at least in the urban environment, that the prohibitions concerning social intercourse and intermarriage are less and less strictly observed. Still, we must not exaggerate: circumstances determine that exceptions to the rules are more immediate and visible to the foreigner's eye than are traditional forms of behaviour. And this is the case even before village India, the true India, is brought into the picture. Elsewhere—and this is yet another of Hinduism's eternal truths, one which we have not minimized—the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and even the whole of the *Mahābhārata*, teaches, together with the ideas of svadharma and unselfish activity, something that corresponds quite directly to what we call duty attached to one's social condition. This is a concept of action that lends itself, at first blush, to an analysis not unlike the one developed by Max Weber regarding the Protestant ethic. The term *sevā*, 'service', is one that recurs quite frequently in the names of many political or social reform groups that have come into being since the arrival of the British powers in India. Here we find an echo of the impression produced among the Hindu intelligentsia by the charitable—'unselfish'—activities of the Christian missionaries. But when we recall that Manu explicitly forbids the practice of any act of *sevā* by Brahmans and assigns the duty of service to Śūdras

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alone—and here too it is the term *sevā* that is used—there is room for doubt. Undoubtedly, the prestige of those in power played a role; and undoubtedly the influence of Vivekananda who had been so impressed in his travels to the West by charitable institutions, and of his Ramakrishna Mission as well, also lent greater credence to the idea of selfless 'service'. It is nevertheless more than likely that all of this took place within pre-existing ideological frames of reference, and that the *Bhagavad Gītā* was its greatest source of inspiration. Interesting statistics might also be generated—but we are lacking in sufficient data for relatively early times—on variations on the number of commentaries written on the *Gītā* in each period of history. It would be a rather safe bet here to say that their numbers have increased markedly over the past decades, and that this renewal of interest is more than a mere effect of advances in publishing techniques. The *Gītā* is the sole widely accessible text that is able to preach to today's Hindu an ideal of action compatible with his deepest held beliefs. India thus possesses, in its most ancient and most authorized tradition, all that it needs to renew its vision of the world and to edify a theology capable of giving spiritual nourishment to a 'modern' society.

We should nevertheless note that the *Gītā*, whose teachings are addressed to a prince, does not speak of service—for how indeed could it do so? It suggests that Arjuna should imitate a god who acts, without having any personal reason for acting, for the 'good of the worlds', but especially for the good of dharma. If there is a question of service here, it can only be one which concerns the impersonal order that keeps the universe in place—and this order is that which the Vedic Revelation promotes. The social hierarchy is thus consecrated, rather than denied, by Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Unselfish action is public duty in the context of dharma alone. Its transposition onto a society built on non-dharmic principles could only be effected if the notion of man itself, or that of society, were to take on some new content; and only if that content were to place man in opposition to an idea of nature, or to an idea of matter placed in the service of man. It is possible to imagine a so-called 'modern' society based on something other than the western 'egalitarian' ideology, or the idea of a class struggle to which that ideology gave rise. But the problem does not lie here: the fact is that India has been spared the universal intrusion of economic structures

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of western origin, structures that have been, consciously or unconsciously, intimately connected with a certain view of the world, a view characterized by the presence of certain tensions. We are not concerned here with demonstrating the unity of this western vision of man and his objects; rather, our aim has been to delineate the specificity of the Hindu vision. Might this not provide us with an ideological foundation, as secularized as one could wish for, that would be capable of giving meaning to a kind of modern life in which work is inserted into a complex network of *indirect* relationships with other people, in which anonymity goes hand in hand with increased responsibility—or in which, to put it more simply, we are asked to believe that man was brought into the world in order to transform it? When, in the West, we use the term 'socialization', in a more sociological than political sense of the word, we are sensitive to mass phenomena, to the omnipresence of the aggregate. The term—whether it be taken in a positive or negative sense—is in fact the counterpart to a more or less conscious assertion on the part of a certain kind of individual, one who would very much like to abandon his individual prerogatives to a certain extent, or one who would refuse this altogether. Modern Indian life is forcing people to move from a society in which the individual counts for nothing into one in which he must learn no longer to count without others. In fact, it is the individual in the western sense of the word, who runs the risk of never surfacing out of this situation; and his loss is the gain of those and those alone who have been, or are, able to grab some modicum of power for themselves. So, there are those who are discovering the joys of 'consumerism' before the greater group has even learned 'production'.

Still to speak in Hindu terms, modern, urban, industrial life is entering India at the level of kāma and artha, for the greater triumph of ahaṃkāra and a further degradation of dharma. The ideology which might be a vehicle for that enormous material transformation—the necessity of which is not denied—is still to be born. To speculate further and to conclude on an optimistic or a pessimistic note would be to substitute one's personal philosophy for the unpredictability of history. Some think that the new material conditions will create the appropriate ideology; but it may be doubted whether things have ever happened in that way in history. Others, more sensitive to the role of ideas and values, will anxiously

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wonder how India will equip herself mentally to face the new challenges. Until then, India will live as best she can and will perhaps take on a face that no one could have predicted.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. I shall not consider here works written in middle-Indian languages—Pali or Prakrit—because they are essentially Buddhist or Jain—rather than Hindu. The Prakrit used in Indian theatre is mixed with Sanskrit and is used to contrast low characters with the high-caste heroes. As for the literature in Dravidian languages, though it has its own literary conventions, its content cannot be said to modify greatly the knowledge which Sanskrit gives of Hindu culture. At most, I shall refer to regional variants, a phenomenon which is peculiar to the Dravidian south.
2. The history of art (architecture and iconography) may have more solid reference points, but the problem then arises of its relationship to the ideas and beliefs of the time. It is impossible to know what is implied in the presence at a particular moment and in a particular region of an iconographic theme which may, in any case, echo other texts that are less well dated and located.
3. This is not to say that one cannot speak of a sub-set constituted by the civilization of south India, but then the ethnic and linguistic oppositions are no longer pertinent. Long before the Muslim invasions in the north, South India had emerged as the great laboratory and conservatory of Hinduism, and a number of the great Sanskrit texts originated there.
4. Neither the critical editions of the two epics, works of this century, nor the editions now being prepared of the main *Purāṇas* will shed light on this aspect of the question. They will be useful to future generations as synopses of the known versions of these texts, which is, after all, justification enough. One has to be more reserved about the publication of 'reconstructed' texts without a critical apparatus and the appendices which preserve important fragments of the traditional versions. The same is true of translations of these 'reconstructed' texts, which are no more than new, 'modernized' versions, in which practically no Hindu recognizes his heritage.

CHAPTER 1

MAN AND THE ABSOLUTE

1. It will be seen subsequently how alongside this neuter *Brahman* there developed in the mythology a 'personified' masculine Brahman, which we shall call Brahmā (nominative masculine form) so as to distinguish it from the former.

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2. The *Śvetāśvatara* (VI. 23) would seem to provide the first instance of use of the term *bhakti*—'partaking, devotion'—in a sense which anticipates that of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, although the Lord is here Rudra-Śiva. The *Śvetāśvatara* also provides the formula which was to become the most traditional expression of devotion (VI. 18): 'I take refuge in this God . . .', but still in an Upaniṣadic context, since it continues: 'I who desire liberation (*mumukṣu*)'.

CHAPTER 2
THE FOUR GOALS OF MAN

1. This detail would be sufficient to show the extent of the prince's religious obligations: blindness prevents a king from exercising his rule because it renders him incapable of sacrificing. It is impossible to conceive of a king who is not also a 'sacrificer'.
2. Yudhiṣṭhira's true father is the god Dharma. This is because Pāṇḍu was condemned never to procreate, as punishment for having slain, while hunting, the male of a pair of antelopes at the moment of their coition. Naturally, the two antelopes prove to be a Brahman saint and his wife, who had taken that animal form in order to satisfy their desire. The dying Brahman cursed Pāṇḍu that he would die when he attempted to have sexual union with one of his wives. *Mahābhārata* citations follow the Poona edition (Chitrashala Press).
3. We cannot be certain that the *TirukkuRal* is a Hindu source. It has been suggested that this is a Jaina text; however, nearly every religious tradition in South India refers to it. Its categories are altogether pan-Indian.
4. This may also be interpreted as a transposition of the soma sacrifice, one of the stately sacrifices which included the consumption of the drink of immortality, an inebriating or even toxic beverage.

CHAPTER 3
SALVATION THROUGH DEEDS: THE YOGIN WARRIOR

1. One might as well enter into the gigantic epic that is the *Mahābhārata* here, since it is both the principal—and undoubtedly the most ancient—of all monuments to bhakti. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is but one of its most dramatic, and doctrinally highly charged, passages. Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the five Pandavas and thereby the heir apparent to the kingdom is, as we have already mentioned, the son of the god Dharma. He is often designated by the title of *Dharmarāja*, the 'king of Dharma' or 'King Dharma' (I personally prefer the latter translation). It is under this name that he is divinized, and continues to be worshipped, down to the present, in Hindu temples.

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2. The term *ahiṃsā* is likewise a desiderative form: literally, it means the 'non-desire to kill.'
3. Following their father's curse, the five Pāṇḍavas, or 'sons of Pāṇḍu,' were fathered by gods from whom they inherited their personalities.
4. What we translate here by 'self-revelation' is the Sanskrit term *a-pauruṣeya-tva*, literally 'the case of not having a puruṣa at its origin.' If we recall that *puruṣa* means 'man', but that it is also one of the names used for the Absolute—that name which bhakti would particularly attribute to the highest God—we immediately see that self-revelation implies a rejection of omniscience on the part of both the human yogin and the great divine Yogin.
5. The young Brahman student will in fact have learned from his guru, prior to his marriage, the totality of the revealed texts, including the *Upaniṣads*. The ritualists see in these an appendix to the rites, one which must be recited in the same way as the rest of the Revelation.
6. Let it be understood clearly here that this in no way constitutes a value judgement, and even less a truth judgement.
7. But should we not yield to India on this point and recognize the fact that even our most rational philosophy—a philosophy that appears to be free of any postulate which is not grounded or explicated in the light of reason—is still nothing more than a theology, to the extent that it in fact rests entirely and *unconsciously* upon a western view of man?
8. Vaiśeṣika philosophy, which generates a theory of the categories of being, draws a correspondence between smell and earth, taste and water, sight and fire (which is also light), touch and air (wind), and sound and the ākāśa. Ākāśa is conventionally translated as 'ether,' even though it bears no relation to the ether of the Greeks. Sāṅkhyan thought draws the same correspondences in its cosmogonic schema.
9. *Cāṇḍāla* (more frequently, *caṇḍāla*) and *paulkasa* designate very low untouchable—and therefore very impure—castes resulting from the worst form of miscegenation between the varṇas (mother of higher birth than father). A Caṇḍāla is the child of a Śudra father and a Brahman mother, a Paulkasa the child of a Śūdra father and a Kṣatriya mother.
10. Etymologically, the word *śramaṇa*, 'ascetic', no doubt designates any renouncer who has recourse to ascetic techniques rather than knowledge. A *tāpasa* (more commonly, *tapasvin*) was, in the Upaniṣadic period, probably a man who practised *tapas*, a warming technique according to etymology. In particular there was an exercise which consisted of sitting in the middle of four fires, under the fifth fire of the sun. But tapas is also probably linked to techniques of autonomous inner warming. In classical literature it refers more generally to any ascetic practice which enhances extraordinary powers. But, to a certain degree, it is regarded as capable of reducing the triple world to ashes.
11. Here we eschew any translation of the term *ātman*, which is often rendered as 'self' or 'the Self'. This is because the self that is treated here is more internal to myself than I (*aham*) am: therefore, it is a self about which I can never say 'I' or 'mine'.
12. We will return to this passage of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, a passage whose importance for later speculations cannot be overemphasized. Here, we should

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simply note that this *Upaniṣad* presents its teaching in the form of a cosmogony in which the *Brahman* constitutes itself as an 'I', begins to desire things, and creates those desired objects.

13. It is nearly impossible to date any of these texts. This is all the more true for the fact that they represent an oral literature which probably took shape progressively, one whose versions would have varied more or less widely. However, the epics appear to be older (from the first centuries before and after the beginning of the common era?) than the whole of the *Purāṇas*. It should nevertheless be recalled that these different textual categories are already enumerated in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, which itself probably goes back to a period several centuries before the common era.
14. It is impossible, within the context of this short book, to go into any depth in our analysis of the historical data, since we have chosen, on the contrary, to introduce the reader to a structural understanding. But if this undertaking is a success, it ought to offer an approach by which to comprehend the historical data; or at least one that offers an adequate historiographic perspective.
15. The mass of the revealed texts is in fact divided into four Vedas: the *Ṛgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, each containing ritualistic texts and *Upaniṣads*. Only the first three are related to the solemn ritual and correspond respectively to the different functions of the priests of this ritual. The fourth has a lower status and contains many magic formulae. That is why reference is made on the one hand to the Four Vedas but on the other to the 'triple science'. The *Yajurveda* is itself divided into two branches, the *Black Yajurveda* and the *White Yajurveda*, which are in turn sub-divided into several schools. It seems that the Taittirīya school of the *Black Yajurveda* was mainly responsible for the re-reading of the Revelation which bhakti constitutes. At present one can only note this without being able to explain it.
16. The term 'classical myths' is used to denote the fundamental myths contained in the epics and the great *Purāṇas*. They represent a first level of re-reading of the contents of the Revelation (myths, rites, abstract notions and values) which already contains considerable variations.
17. It is impossible here to give a detailed account of the yogic and cosmogonic levels given the number of Sahskrit terms which have no equivalent in either English or French.
18. The schema is in fact slightly more complex. It is especially important here to see that the end of the world is assimilated with a yogic process.
19. It is from this expression that the title of *mahātma(n)*, attributed to holy individuals such as Gandhi, is derived. It at once connotes superhuman knowledge and an active benevolence towards the world.
20. In the vocabulary of Hindu logic, *guṇa* designates quality as opposed to substance. In the perspectives of the epics, *Purāṇas*, and classical Sāṅkhya, which were already known to the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the three *guṇas* are more akin to components which make up all that exists empirically. They are also naturally hierarchized, and by virtue of this fact, they are able to afford a classificatory principle for beings, according to the relative proportions in which the *guṇas* are found within each of them.

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21. In reality, it is Nārāyaṇa who, lying upon the ocean of the floodwaters (see p. 110), transforms himself into Brahmā. According to other versions, there emerges from the navel of the sleeping Nārāyaṇa a lotus which, when it blossoms, causes Brahmā to appear.
22. In fact, the question is slightly more complex than this. Moreover, we will soon see another interpretation of this preserving function that is Viṣṇu's, but this does not preclude the one given here.
23. There are variants to this, but these do not carry us far afield of our model: Subhramaṇya (also known as Skanda, Kārttikeya, Kumāra, Ṣaṇmukha and Murukan) and Gaṇapati (or Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god) are the sons of Śiva, whereas Aiyanār is the son of Viṣṇu and Śiva. This filiation is a mythic transposing of the divine manifestation which owes nothing to the theory of avatāras, at least not directly. These gods are nonetheless protectors of dharma and the divinities of brahmanic lineages. Naturally, we must add to these a large population of subordinate gods, who are more or less local.
24. It should nevertheless be noted that, in the account of the reabsorption of the world which begins a few chapters later, it is no longer a question of the end of the Kaliyuga, but of the end of a kalpa. This ending is no longer placed in direct relation to an increase in disorder, but rather to a general weakening of the creatures, with the arrival of the end of a day of Brahmā.
25. We still lack an essential structural element for the understanding of the major currents of bhakti and of numerous reform sects (cf. the preceding chapter). But the universality of salvation, and therefore the integration of the Śūdras (but still not yet of all of the lower castes) is one of the important concrete dimensions proper to both Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.
26. It has been asked whether the *Bhagavad Gītā* was truly a part of the *Mahābhārata* or whether it was rather an addition. The question is hardly worthy of consideration, since this beautiful text can only take on its full religious value when it is situated in the epic context.
27. It should be recalled that this is a crime according to dharma, but that it may be justified in the context of artha. Cf. pp. 53–8.
28. Book 10 of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*—another monument of Kṛṣṇa bhakti—again takes up this theme of the mouth of God as containing the universe. This time, however, the terrible element is entirely lacking: when baby Kṛṣṇa yawns, he allows his mother to see the universe dwelling in him.
29. This is the properly Hindu formulation of what is undoubtedly a more universal tension: that of being in the world as if one were not, and that of wearing down the world as if one were not.
30. In fact, the two terms are already associated in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.13), a text which we may qualify, on the basis of its connection to the *Black Yajurveda*, as well as of its contents, as one that leads from the yoga of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* to the bhakti of the *Gītā*.
31. Obviously, there is an analogous proliferation to be found in Christian devotion to Jesus: the Infant Jesus, the Sacred Heart, etc. However, these refer to none other than Jesus, God made man. Undoubtedly, it is herein that the essential difference lies, even if imagination plays the same role in both cases.

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32. This in no way hinders a strong personality from asserting itself, in a village or elsewhere, even on a civic level.
33. There are, of course, exceptions to this. The mystic literature of Hindu bhakti certainly implies this uniqueness of the deity, but it no more constitutes bhakti than mystic Christian literature constitutes Christianity.

CHAPTER 4
DIVINE LOVES

1. Prior to the Aryan invasions, the Dravidians probably constituted the dominant element of the subcontinent's population. The majority of South Indians, who speak Dravidian languages, are still ethnically Dravidians. However, the cultural meaning of this ethnic distinction is much more problematic.
2. Conceptual system based on the *Tantras*. See p. 148.
3. Is it not significant that the more or less tantric systems of bhakti, rather than employing the neuter term *pradhāna* preferred by Sāṅkhya, opt for the feminine term *prakṛti*, for which they offer numerous synonyms?
4. We translate the term *vyaṅgya* as 'suggested' or 'suggestive,' as opposed to 'expressed,' as a means of distinguishing between the rasa and the meaning of a word. But it is also with this term, or with other forms of the same radical, that Bhartṛhari designates the essential or internal word, that word which is to be externally 'manifested' by the dhvani.
5. It is impossible to account for every detail of this myth within the scope of this study. It seems obvious to me that the episode of the asuras Madhu and Kaiṭabha is a transformation of a *Mahābhārata* myth regarding Karṇa ('Ear').
6. *Tejas* is an untranslatable term which especially designates, in the context of classical mythology, the most essential principle of such beings as ascetics or warriors—of those people capable of 'burning up' the worlds in a literal or a figurative sense.
7. Fundamentally, the myths of the goddess found in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which is said to be a tantric source, follow the same schema.
8. This in spite of her names which end, according to the language in question, in *amma* or *-ambā* or *āī*, 'mother', a respectful form of address. This may help to bring together the seven sisters with the Saptamātṛkā, 'the Seven Mothers', well known from classical iconography.
9. It should be noted that among the seven sisters, whose names have come down to us in forms in which the original Sanskrit is sometimes markedly disfigured, Lakṣmī remains a goddess in good standing. Village India sees no conflict between a goddess who is supposed to be Śaivite and one who is supposed to be Vaiṣṇavite.
10. In reality, the situation is more complex than this. It is possible to have two or three goddesses associated with a god, with each occupying a niche on a hierarchy. In this case, one of these may play the role of the guardian goddess of

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a locality. More than this, the goddess is not necessarily the wife of the god: for example, Paraśurāma, an unmarried god from Konkan and an avatāra of Viṣṇu, has his mother Reṇukā associated with his cult, while the Jagannātha of Purī is flanked by his sister Subhadrā (who is, moreover, duly identified with the virgin goddess), who is herself placed between her two brothers.

11. We should at least indicate that Nārāyaṇa—Viṣṇu in his yogic form—is the god of predilection for the Sannyāsin, that is, of the Brahman renouncer. The formula 'Nārāyaṇa' is always present in his salutations; and it is also this form that he uses when he signs his letters.
12. Is it for this reason that the abbot of Śaṅkaran monasteries is daily obliged to offer worship to the Śrī Cakra, the diagram that represents Śrī? We know that, in the classical view of dharmic society, the good sannyāsin also bears a positive role in the world order.
13. Her name is in fact derived from the name of one of the seven tongues of the sacrificial Fire—Agni—in the Veda. The *Devī Māhātmya* myth gives this tongue a purpose, since Kālī's role in it is to lick up the drops of blood that fall from the demon Raktabīja before they touch the ground—for each drop has the potential of producing a new demon.
14. By Śaiva Brahmans, we are referring to a caste of temple priests who consider themselves to be Brahmans even though Brahmans do not consider them to be such. They are more commonly known in Tamil country by the name *gurukkaḷ*, and are priests in temples of Śiva and of the goddess. The gurukkaḷs of Tamil areas maintain that theirs is a tradition based on the Śaivite *Āgamas* rather than on the Veda, and belong to a sect whose doctrine is codified in the texts of the Śaivasiddhānta.
15. It should be recalled that Nārāyaṇa is Viṣṇu withdrawn into a yogic sleep on the floodwaters of a cosmic night, Viṣṇu who has reabsorbed into himself all of the world's creatures. As the divinity of the sannyāsin, he is also explicitly the god of liberation—which, from the 'orthodox' viewpoint, is a prerogative reserved for renouncing Brahmans alone.
16. The *Brahma Sūtras* constitute the basic text of the classic system of Vedānta. Śaṅkara's is the earliest commentary that has survived down to the present; however, his nondualistic gloss perhaps does not respect the original purport of the *sūtras* themselves. It should be recalled that Śaṅkara succeeded in generating an 'orthodox' synthesis of brahmanic renunciation and ritualism.
17. *Gosvāmin*: one of the numerous names, found in Kṛṣṇa bhakti, to conain *go-*, 'cow', as its first term. The god himself receives the name of Govinda, the signification of which is disputed by various traditions: is he the 'discoverer of the cows' or the 'leader of the cowherds'? As Veṇugopāla, he is the 'cowherd with a flute,' a well-known iconographic depiction. Part of his childhood is spent at Gokula, in the 'family of cows', just as other 'twice-born' individuals spend theirs in the gurukula, the family of the guru: here he is surrounded by cowherds (*gopas*) and cowgirls (*gopīs*). The mountain which he lifts with one finger in order to shelter cows and cowherds from the rain unleashed by Indra is called Govardhana ('that which causes cows to grow or prosper'). Finally, when he is considered to be the supreme form of Puruṣa, as a substitute for Viṣṇu, his

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paradise is called Goloka, the 'world of cows' (after the same fashion as Brahmaloka, Viṣṇuloka, etc.). Modern interpretation, which clearly betrays an imagination of a different order from that of the Hindus, sees in these constant references to cows a proof for a pastoral origin of the god, or at least for one of the god's aspects (which one is then obliged to consider as the synthesis of several characters between whom no logical connection exists). Yet, given the symbolism of the cow in the brahmanic ideology, it appears that another interpretation, of the particular mythic order proper to Viṣṇu's avatāras, is possible. In this light, we can understand that monks of the Kṛṣṇa tradition would have distinguished themselves from the innumerable multitude of svāmins by adding the *go*-prefix to their general title of svāmin.

18. We will return to this temple cult which, in itself, has more to do with tantrism than with bhakti. However, uninitiated worshippers participate in these in their own way, and bring to them concepts quite other than those of tantrism. Their spiritual nourishment comes more from the *Purāṇas* and epic narratives than it does from the Tantra.
19. This formula is to be taken in a literal sense. This means, among other things, that the sexual union between a man and a woman cannot help but be one of the means employed to reproduce, *within one's self*, this permanent and consubstantial union with the divine.

CHAPTER 5

HINDUISM AND THE FUTURE

1. Porbandar is not far from Dvārkā, the centre of the cult of Kṛṣṇa in his Kṣatriya form, on the Saurāṣṭra coast which still rings with the epic deeds of Kṛṣṇa. The myth of Sudāma is moreover purāṇic rather than epic.

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Glossary

This glossary is intended to indicate to the non-Sanskritist reader, the approximate meaning of the Sanskrit words that it has been necessary to use in the course of the argument. It also includes the names of some frequently mentioned authors and doctrines. The page numbers which follow some of the terms refer to passages which deal more explicitly with the notion in question. English equivalents of Sanskrit terms have been used in the text whenever their use would not be misleading; thus some key items of brahmanic terminology do not appear here.

Abhinavagupta, philosopher of tantric Śaivism in Kashmir.

āgamas, 149. Set of texts regarded by their adepts as revealed, to which the Tantras and most of the rituals of the major temples make reference. They sometimes include the Vaiṣṇavite *Saṃhitās*, but sometimes the term applies only to the Śaivite texts.

aham, 'I'.

ahaṃkāra, 38. Term used to designate the empirical ego which says 'I' and 'mine' to distinguish itself from others.

ahiṃsā, 32. 'Absence of the desire to kill', from which the English term 'non-violence' is derived.

ākāśa, 91. The most 'subtle' of the five material elements. It follows earth, water, fire and air. It is the material support for sound and is conventionally translated as 'ether'.

alaukika, 145. 'Not of this world', i.e. not part of the ordinary custom of this world (*loka*). Hence 'extraordinary'.

ānanda, 'beatitude'. The term most often used for the beatitude of the Absolute, which is attained in liberation.

Ānandavardhana, theoretician of Sanskrit poetics in Kashmir, master of the *dhvani* school; ninth century.

āraṇyakas, 31. Literally, 'forest (books)'. The group of revealed texts which belong between the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads*.

Arjuna, the third of the five Pāṇḍava brothers in the *Mahābhārata*.

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The son of the god Indra (the king of the Vedic gods), he is the close friend of Kṛṣṇa. The latter is the incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, while Arjuna is the incarnation of Nara (man, a synonym of *puruṣa*) and represents the ideal prince who imitates the avatāra.

artha, 53–8. Designates any goal of an action, hence everything which is useful, any material interest. It is also the object to which a word points (both its meaning and its concrete use). Technically, it is one of the 'goals of man', the pursuit of wealth and material prosperity, for which the king is more particularly responsible on behalf of his subjects.

Arthaśāstra, 'Treatise of artha', attributed to the Brahman Kauṭilya, identified with a minister of the emperor Candragupta Maurya (fourth century BC). Deals with all aspects of royal governance.

ārya, 'noble'. General name for the three higher categories of brahmanic society.

ashram, see *āśrama*.

āśrama, a Hindu renouncer's hermitage, or a community grouped around a spiritual master. A stage of life.

asuras, inhabitants of the infernal regions. They become evil when they try to usurp the place of the gods in heaven or incarnate themselves as princes on earth to oppress the Brahmans. They are then the personification of *a-dharma*, and an avatāra of Viṣṇu must appear in order to rid the world of them.

ātman, 17. Third person reflexive personal pronoun. The name given to the eternal principle which animates the empirical individual.

avatāra, 103, 113–16. A 'descent' of the supreme God, especially Viṣṇu, into the world to re-establish weakened dharma.

avyakta, 93. 'Non-distinct, unmanifest'. In Purāṇic terminology, it is synonymous with *pradhāna* and *prakṛti*.

Bhagavad Gītā, 113–17. The most famous section of Book VI of the *Mahābhārata*: Kṛṣṇa's speech to Arjuna, which is the charter of orthodox bhakti.

Bhāgavata-purāna, the *Purāṇa* in which Kṛṣṇaite devotion begins to be unleashed in its erotic expression (especially Book X). It develops the story of the childhood of Kṛṣṇa, the theme of the *gopīs* and *rāsalīlā*. Rādhā does not appear in it.

bhakta, 'devotee', a follower of the religion of *bhakti*.

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bhakti, the dominant form of Hinduism which implies a relationship of grace given by God to his creature and of total devotion given by the creature to God. Bhakti makes it possible to obtain liberation while remaining in society.

Bhartṛhari, 51. The author of aphorisms on the 'goals of man', the *Śatakatraya*. Indeterminate date. 125. A philosopher of grammar. Late fifth century.

Bhīma, 70. The second of the five Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*. He is the son of the Vedic god Vāyu (the Wind).

Bhīṣma, 57. The paternal great-uncle of the Pāṇḍavas and of their enemy cousins in the *Mahābhārata*. He renounced marriage and the throne so as to enable the king, his father, to marry the woman he desired and ensure that the kingdom passed to her children.

Brahmā, see *Brahman*.

brahmacārin, 67. The name given to the brahman student during the time he spends with his guru to learn the Veda, which is also a period of celibacy. It is also the title given to a renouncer who moves directly from the first 'stage of life' to the fourth.

Brahman, 17–23. At the lower level, this term, in the neuter form, designates the ritual formula, and then the Brahman's Vedic knowledge, science and power, the Veda itself or its symbol, the syllable *Oṃ*. In the masculine, it is the name of one of the priests of the Vedic sacrifice. At the higher level, it is the Absolute (distinguished here by italics and a capital letter). This (neuter) Absolute also gives a divine personality, designated here in the nominative masculine form: *Brahmā*.

brāhmaṇas, 18. In the neuter, a group of ritual texts forming part of the Vedic or brahmanic Revelation. 19. In the masculine, it is the name of the first *varṇa*, that of the priests and clerics of brahmanic society. Anglicized here as Brahman.

Brahma-sūtra, 143. Basic text of classical Vedānta, on which every Vedāntic school produced commentaries.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, one of the great ancient 'Vedāntic' Upaniṣads, and one of the longest. It is connected to the *White Yajurveda*.

Caitanya, fourteenth century mystic of the Kṛṣṇa cult. While he was not an author himself, he gave the original impulse to the Vaiṣṇavite sect led by the *gosvāmins*.

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camatkāra, 128–9. 'Instant astonishment'. A notion held in common by Kashmiri poeticists and theoreticians of mysticism.

Caṇḍāla, an untouchable theoretically born of a Brahman mother and a Śūdra father. In Hindu texts, he often symbolizes the lowest castes.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 26. One of the oldest and longest of the *Upaniṣads*, the one in which the identity of the ātman and the *Brahman* is taught. Connected to the *Sāmaveda*.

darśana, 'view, way of seeing'. Generic name given to conceptual systems, in particular to the six systems recognized as orthodox and grouped in pairs: Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga.

deva, 'god', particularly the gods of Vedic sacrifice, the inhabitants of *svarga*.

devadāsī, temple prostitute.

Devīmāhātmya, 'Glorification of the goddess'. Part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*. In it the goddess is essentially the *asura*-slayer.

dharma, 41–6. The socio-cosmic order which keeps the universe in existence. Disorder, *a-dharma*, leads to an end of the world. Care of dharma is particularly entrusted to the Brahmans.

dhvani, 126–7. Material 'sound', especially articulate, uttered, audible sound, as opposed to the inner speech which carries meaning. In poetics, it is the suggested element, the source of emotion, as opposed to the expressed meaning.

dhyāna, a technical term of yoga which connotes the concentration of the mind on a single object.

Durgā, 'she who is difficult—or dangerous—to approach'. One of the 'terrible names' of the goddess, wife of Śiva.

Gaṇapati or *Gaṇeśa*, the elephant-headed son of Śiva and Pārvatī. According to myth, he was born from filth cleansed from Pārvatī's body. His name means 'leader of (Śiva's) hordes', a name which bears no apparent correspondence to his mythology. He is the god of beginnings, because he destroys those obstacles that would prevent one seeing an enterprise through to its end.

Gītagovinda, 128. Erotic and mystic poem composed by Jayadeva in the twelfth century, and which treats of the loves of the cowherd Kṛṣṇa and the cowherdess Rādhā. Their erotic relations

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are a metaphor for the mystic relationship between Kṛṣṇa, the highest god, and the individual soul.

gopī, 'cowherdess'. A figure in Kṛṣṇa bhakti who represents the individual soul, Kṛṣṇa himself being the divine cowherd, *gopāla*. Rādhā is Kṛṣṇa's favourite gopī.

gosvāmins, 46. Successors to Caitanya, they produced the literature of the Kṛṣṇa sect that was formed around him.

guṇa, 96. Name of the three components of nature—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—according to which all beings are classified.

guru, 'spiritual master'.

Haṭha Yoga, a school of yoga that emphasizes bodily techniques.

Hitopadeśa, 'Teaching on that which is beneficial'. A collection of Indian tales whose aim is to illustrate maxims of practical behaviour.

Īśvara, 'the Lord', the title commonly given to God in the context of bhakti.

jāti, 'caste' (literally, 'birth').

Jayadeva, twelfth century author of the *Gītagovinda*.

jñāna, 'knowledge', more especially knowledge of ultimate reality.

Kālī, 'The Black Female'. One of the 'terrible names' for the goddess, Śiva's wife.

Kaliyuga, the fourth and last yuga. We live in this, the worst of times. This is the Hindu 'age of iron'.

kalpa, 101. Name of a day of Brahmā, situated between two cosmic reabsorptions, which constitute his nights.

kāma, 46–52. 'Desire', and more particularly 'amorous desire'. One of the 'goals of man'.

Kāmadhenu, 'that (cow) from which one milks all that one desires'. Name of the cow which symbolizes the power of the Brahman.

Kāmaśāstra, *Kāma Sūtra*. The two names used to designate the 'Treatise on Love' attributed to the Brahman Vātsyāyana. Date undetermined.

karman, 23, 60–61. Any act, but particularly ritual acts. Because all acts are performed with a view to future results, karman is also that which condemns one to be reborn so as to reap the fruits that have not yet 'ripened' in this life.

kāruṇya, 94. 'Compassion'. The pity felt by the mystic for those who remain unaware of Reality and therefore suffer.

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Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 27. One of the yogic *Upaniṣads*, belonging to the *Black Yajurveda*.

Kauravas, the name of the Pāṇḍavas' enemy cousins in the *Mahābhārata*.

Kṛṣṇa, the most renowned *avatāra* of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata* in particular, he appears as a Kṣatriya who, while divested of his royal power, remains a very much heeded advisor to the Pāṇḍavas. He gives his sister in marriage to Arjuna. In later Kṛṣṇa bhakti, he appears especially as the young cowherd of the Mathurā region with whom all the cowherdesses are in love, but whose favourite is Rādhā.

Kṛtayuga, the first and most 'perfect' (*kṛta*) of the four yugas. This is the Hindu 'age of gold'.

kṣatra, a neuter term designating the function of the Kṣatriya.

Kṣatriya, 20. The second varṇa of brahmanic society, that of warriors and princes.

Lakṣmī, one of the names for the goddess when she is associated with Viṣṇu. An expression denoting prosperity produced through Vedic sacrifice.

laukika, 145. 'Worldly, of common usage'.

līlā, 'play, game'.

liṅga, 106, 156. Phallic symbol of Siva, generally represented engaged in the female organ—*yoni*.

Liṅgāyat, a Śaivite sect from central Deccan, distinguished in particular by the individual liṅga which each member wears around his neck.

loka, 'world', a region of the universe distinguished by those who inhabit or rule it.

Madhva, a Vedāntic philosopher, a 'dualist' who maintained the distinction between God and individual ātmans; thirteenth century.

Mahābhārata, the more voluminous of the two brahmanic epics (the other being the *Rāmāyaṇa*). It is attributed to the mythical Vyāsa and deals with the 'lunar dynasty'. Its composition spanned several centuries, and it has different regional versions. Overall, it appears to have already been established by the first centuries AD.

mahākalpa, 101. Name of the period which constitutes a life of Brahmā.

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mahān ātmā, 92, 95. 'The Great Ātman' (in the masculine nominative form). The name given to that level of yogic ascension in which empirical finitude is transcended. In the *Purāṇas*, *mahān* (or the neuter *mahat*) is the corresponding level of cosmogony.

mama, literally/'of myself', 'mine'. Together with *aham*, it circumscribes the sphere of the *ahaṃkāra*.

manas, both an internal organ and the *sensus communis* which relates the ātman to all empirical data.

mānasapratyaksa, 80. 'Mental perception', that is, perception through the manas, without the participation of the external sense organs.

Maṇḍana Miśra, a 'non-dualist' Vedāntic philosopher, more or less contemporary with Śaṅkara.

mantra, a formula which, accompanying a rite, is always characterized by the fact that what counts is not its meaning but rather its utterance at a particular moment. This is also the term for a formula which is given to a new initiate into a sect and which he is expected to repeat as part of his daily ritual.

Manu, the Adam of several brahmanic myths. He is the supposed author of the most orthodox treatise of laws (*The Laws of Manu*), of indeterminate date.

māyā, 75. The power of illusion attributed to various gods or ascetics. In 'non-dualist' Vedānta, it is the cosmos itself, conceived as an illusion. It came to be identified with Nature—*prakṛti*.

Mīmāṃsa, 28–9. One of the six systems of orthodox philosophy, the one built up to generate the rules for interpreting the Vedic texts (essentially those of the *Black Yajurveda*). Vedānta borrows many of its concepts, and works concerned with dharma make use of its rules of textual interpretation.

mokṣa, 23. Liberation from rebirth. The opposite of *saṃsāra*, transmigration. It is one of the goals of man'.

mumukṣu, 'one who desires liberation'.

Nārāyaṇa, 110. One of the names of Viṣṇu, more especially in his form as a god sleeping on the serpent Śeṣa and the primordial ocean, during the cosmic night.

Nāṭyaśāstra, 'Treatise of dramatic art and dance'. Attributed to the mythical sage Bharata. First centuries AD?

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nīti, 'conduct', the 'art of conduct' for someone who seeks to achieve a definite material end—*artha*.

Nītiśāstra, 'Treatise of the art of conduct' (to ensure success). A set of large overlapping collections of aphorisms. They complete the *Arthaśāstra*, but apply to any man who seeks artha.

Nyāya, 74. One of the six systems of orthodox philosophy, which was built up around the brahmanic theory of logic. It is associated with Vaiśeṣika.

Pāñcarātra, one of the tantric Vaiṣṇavite sects of South India. Its *Saṃhitās* inspire the ritual that is found in the majority of Vaiṣṇavite temples in the south.

Pārvatī, one of the auspicious names for the goddess when she is married to Śiva. She is the daughter of Parvata, 'the mountain.'

paśu, 'livestock', 'sacrificial victim'. In South Indian Śaivism, the term is also applied to individual souls, distinct from God who is their master.

Patañjali, supposed author of the *Yogasūtras*, the fundamental text of classical yoga. Approximately second or third centuries AD

pati, 'lord, master'. The Vedic Rudra-Śiva, who was already called Paśupati, 'Lord of Livestock' or 'of sacrificial victims', is, in South Indian tantric Śaivism, the *pati* of the *paśus* who are the creatures.

pradhāna, 'primary basis'. One of the names of original Nature in the *Purāṇas* and in Sāṅkhya.

prakṛti, 'primordial form". One of the names of original Nature in the *Purāṇas* and in Sāṅkhya. Its feminine form allows tantric identification with Śakti.

prasāda, (divine) 'grace', symbolized by a small amount of consecrated food given to the worshipper in a temple in return for the offering he has himself brought.

preman, 'love' and more especially the transcendent love of the divine couple.

Purāṇas, a group of texts belonging to the Tradition. Theoretically, the Purāṅas relate the origins of humanity and of Indian history. In fact they present, in a form accessible to all, the substance of treatises of ritual, codes of laws, the description of holy places, etc.—everything a Hindu needs to know in order to act correctly in all circumstances. Composed at many different times.

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Puruṣa, 24. 'Male; man'. One of the names of the Absolute (capitalized in this case).

puruṣārtha, 'goal of man.'

Rādhā, 145–7. Kṛṣṇa's favourite *gopī*, a character who seems to appear quite late in Kṛṣṇa bhakti, and who contributes in a marked way to the eroticization of its mystic expression. In tantric sects, Rādhā, transformed into the Śakti, becomes more important than Kṛṣṇa.

rājan, 'king' (in compounds: *rāja-*).

rajas, 96. One of the three components or *guṇas* of nature, the one which represents activity and causes there to be movement.

Rāmānuja, the Vedāntic philosopher of the 'non-dualism of the qualified'; eleventh century. The originator of the Śrīvaiṣṇava sect.

Rāmāyaṇa, one of the two great brahmanic epics. The saga of the ideal king of the 'solar dynasty', Rāma, who is also an avatāra of Viṣṇu. Attributed to Vālmīki. Composed over several centuries?

rasa, 124–8. 'flavour, relish,' hence 'agreeable emotion', aesthetic, erotic or mystical, or all three at once.

rāsalīlā, 'game (made) of rasa'.

rasāsvāda, 'enjoyment of rasa'.

ṛṣi, mythic 'seers' who, according to some, transmitted the Revelation. According to others, they 'saw' this Revelation and transmitted its contents in a form accessible to the common man. In the epics and *Purāṇas*, they are exemplary characters, half-renouncers, half-householders, who serve as teachers or who are the heroes of didactic myths.

Rudra, 97. 'The Terrible'. The most common name of Śiva in the Vedic literature.

sādhaka, one who devotes himself to the pursuit of the Absolute or, at times, more particularly to supernatural powers connected with this quest (*siddhi*).

sādhana, process leading towards an internal realization of the mode of being of the Absolute, which ultimately amounts to identification with the Absolute.

Śakti, 149–50. Divine 'power, energy'. The feminine aspect of the divinity which ensures its manifestation as the cosmos.

Śakuntalā, a dramatic work by Kālidāsa, whose subject matter is borowed from the *Mahābhārata*.

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samādhi, technical yogic term which designates the highest form of mystic contemplation.

Saṃhitās, 18. Collections of versified hymns. The most ancient texts of the Vedic Revelation. 148. Set of texts regarded by some as revealed, to which the Vaiṣṇavite Tantras refer.

saṃsāra, 23. 'Transmigration'. Opposite of *mokṣa*.

Śaṅkara, 74–5. The founder of non-dualist Vedānta. The works of which his authorship is established consist of commentaries on the major *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*.

Sāṅkhya, 118. One of the six orthodox philosophical systems. It was associated, at a very early date, with yoga, but probably not in its classical form (that of the *Sāṅkhya-kārikās*), which is relatively late.

Sāṅkhya-kārikās, basic text of the Sāṅkhya system (fourth century?).

sannyāsa, 24. 'Renunciation' and more specifically the orthodox form of renunciation of the world.

sannyāsin, 27. 'Renouncer', in particular a man of high caste who has renounced the world to become a religious ascetic.

śāntarasa, 'rasa of one who is pacified'. The aesthetic and religious emotion arising from a pacified vision of things, that is close to Absolute truth.

śānti, 'peace'. The term has always had a religious connotation. It is the peace known to one who has realized absolute Reality.

śāstra, an authoritative 'treatise', whose author, whether mythic or historical, is always a Brahman.

satī, the perfect wife, faithful to her husband. In a secondary sense, she is the widow who throws herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

sattva, 96. The first of the three components or *guṇas* of Nature, the one which is luminous, pure and pacified and which predominates in the being which accedes to Knowledge.

sevā, 'service', forbidden to the Brahman, and the only activity permitted to the Śūdra.

Śivā, 97. One of the two great gods of bhakti. His role as a catalyst of impurity in the Vedic sacrifice (under the name Rudra) causes him to be especially connected with those forms of renunciation which are most removed from the orthodox path.

Skanda, the son of Śiva and Pārvatī, although in the various myths

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of his birth he is born of the seed of Śiva but not from the womb of a woman. He is already known to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VII. 26.2).

smṛti, lit. 'memory'. This is the Tradition, as opposed to Revelation, a great mass of texts including additions to the ritualistic parts of the Revelation, treatises of socio-religious laws (*Dharma-śāstra*), the two epics (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*) and the *Purāṇas*. This Tradition is capitalized to distinguish it from tradition in general.

Śrī, see *Lakṣmī*. The two names are practically synonymous.

Śrīvaiṣṇavas, a sect of Vaiṣṇavite Brahmans of South India, who combine worship of Viṣṇu and Śrī. They have a Pāñcarātra ritual, venerate the twelve Vaiṣṇavite bhaktas whose poetical and mystical works are the origin of the sect's whole literature, and follow the philosophy of Rāmānuja.

śruti, 18. Literally, 'hearing'. Used to designate the set of fundamental texts of brahmanism that are regarded as revealed.

Śūdra, 20. Fourth varṇa of brahmanic society, that of the servant castes. Not admitted to Vedic ritual.

svadharma, 45 ff. Each varṇa's 'own dharma'.

svāmin, title conferred on renouncers and used to address them. *Swami* is the usual form in English.

svarga, 'Heaven', which, in Vedic literature, represents the abode of the gods and that of men of high caste after their death, if they have been faithful to their dharma. In the *Purāṇas*, it is only the upper part of the 'triple world' organized by dharma. It will be destroyed at the time of cosmic reabsorption.

svārtha, 55. Formed from *sva-artha*, 'personal interest'.

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, 28. One of the yogic *Upaniṣads*, probably more recent than the *Kaṭha*, but also related to the *Black Yajurveda*.

swami, see *svāmin*.

Taittirīya, name of a very important school of the *Black Yajurveda*, which, from the *Samhitās* to the *Upaniṣads* which it contains, provides the revealed starting point for many myths or epic and purāṇic speculations. Its ritualistic part provides most of the basic text from which Mīmāṃsā built up the rules for interpreting the Veda.

tamas, 'darkness'. One of the three *guṇas* which constitute Nature,

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the one which predominates in animals. It connotes ignorance and inertia.

Tantras, 148. A set of texts, based on the Āgamas and the Samhitās, which present a teaching sometimes of ritual, sometimes of yogic practices; the common element is a conception of the divine as formed of the union of the god and his *śakti*. In their extreme forms, the Tantras place the śakti above the god.

tāntrika, a member of a tantric sect.

tejas, the burning and shining heat that especially characterizes gods, warriors and ascetics.

trailokya, 41. The 'three-worlds'—earth, heaven and hell—governed by dharma.

Trimūrti, 100. Level of manifestation of the deity in which it makes itself triple in order to preside over the different states of the cosmos.

Umā, one of the auspicious names of the goddess, wife of Śiva.

Upaniṣads, 17. A group of texts belonging to the Vedic Revelation, which preach deliverance from rebirths and show the path to the Absolute. Until recent times, the different sects continued to compose *Upaniṣads*, but these are not attached to a Vedic school and are not part of the Revelation.

Vaiśeṣika, 74. One of the six systems of orthodox philosophy; it provides the theory of the categories of being. Associated with Nyāya.

Vaiṣṇava, worshipper of Viṣṇu (the common English form is Vaiṣṇavite). Name of the Bengali sect begun by Caitanya, which in fact worships Kṛṣṇa as the highest form of the divine.

Vaiśya, 20. The third varṇa of brahmanic society, that of farmers and merchants.

varṇa, 20. 'Class'. Brahmanic society is ideally divided into four varṇas. The term designates simultaneously a social function, a status, and a specific relationship to Vedic ritual.

Veda, 18, 90. Literally, 'knowledge'. This is Knowledge *par excellence*, the Revelation. The texts which constitute it are divided into four major groups which form the four Vedas: *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The first three correspond respectively to three categories of priests in the Vedic sacrifice. The fourth, which contains many magic formulae, is considered inferior.

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vedānta, 18. 'Completion of the Veda'. This term is used to refer to the Vedic Upaniṣads, 26. Classical philosophical system which conceptualizes the teaching of the *Upaniṣads* on the Absolute and liberation (a capital letter distinguishes it in this sense). It is sub-divided into numerous schools.

Viṣṇu, 97. One of the two great gods of bhakti, who, because of his original relationship with the Vedic sacrifice, remains most closely connected to the orthodoxy.

Viṣṇu-purāṇa, 104. One of the most important of the principal Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas. It is perhaps older than the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, if their relative ages are to be determined according to the degree of development of an emotional bhakti centred on the cowherd Kṛṣṇa.

vyaṅgya, 'manifestable', 'that can be suggested'.

Vyāsa. A mythic Brahman who is regarded as the original 'seer' of the Vedas and the author of the *Mahābhārata* (in which he appears as a character) and the *Purāṇas*. He also goes under the name of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana and, like Kṛṣṇa himself is held to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. He is the Brahman counter-part to the Kṣatriya Kṛṣṇa.

yoga, 27. Set of psycho-physiological technique which vary greatly from one school to another. In principle, the goal is to achieve experience of the 'liberated' state in this life, but it is also seen as way of attaining supra-natural capacities. The methods include physical exercises to achieve control over the unstriped muscles and mental exercises to empty thought of all empirical content and maintain it in perfect immobility. The classical system (118, distinguished by capital Y) is what orthodox thought has retained from these concrete yogas.

yogin, adept of yoga; feminine *yoginī*. The common English form is *yogi*.

yoni, female symbol, a vulva in which the liṅga is engaged.

Yudhiṣṭhira, 57, 70. The eldest of the five Pāṇḍavas, the descendants of the 'lunar dynasty' and the central figures of the *Mahābhārata*.

yugas, 102. The name of the cosmic periods which come in groups of four and each of which indicates a given state of perfection or degradation of dharma. An avatāra of Viṣṇu generally appears at the time of transition from one yuga to another.

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Mind, Body and Wealth

A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village

D. F. Pocock

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To the memory of Purusottam Jhavarbhai Patel

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Om. Shri Krishna is my refuge. Having suffered the profound pain and anguish of a thousand long years' separation from Him, I dedicate to the blessed Krishna my body, mind and other faculties, and my wife, house, property and all my wealth together with myself. I am thy slave, O Krishna.

(Formula of dedication for the Vaishnavite at his initiation.)

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Preface

In this book I describe an area of Indian belief, and changes which appear to be taking place within it. It may seem rather perverse of me to refer to an area of belief instead of speaking directly about religion. Nevertheless, I am reluctant to use this word for two main reasons: in the first place we cannot dissociate the word from its history; there is no doubt that the word religion has, in the West, come to connote an area of the *special*, a mode of reasoning about the universe governed by rules which are not those of day-to-day thought. Whether we think of ourselves as being 'religious' or 'not religious', *the* religious remains, however much churchmen may lament, a separate area of life in the West. This separateness tends to infect anthropological discussion of the topic to such an extent that religious behaviour, as opposed to any other kind, political or economic for example, calls for the introduction of special premises or assumptions about human nature. In the account which follows I have not felt it necessary to make any special assumptions nor, even, to use the word religion. The reader may judge for himself whether his understanding suffers on that account.

My second objection derives, no doubt, from a reaction against a great deal of high-flown writing about Hinduism, by authors who, often, freely admit that we cannot speak of Hinduism as we speak of Christianity or Islam. However much such writings feed the romantic interest in the mystical East, they seem to me to have little to say about the people

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who are said to hold these beliefs. One such author, by implication, admits as much. Professor R. C. Zaehner in his book *Hinduism* says that 'One of the parodoxes of Hinduism has always been the yawning gap that separates its higher manifestations from the frankly superstitious and magical practices that go to make up the religious fare of the rural masses.' (O.U.P., 1962, p. 246.) In what sense is this a paradox? If we were trying to understand Christianity as a social and historical fact should we limit ourselves solely to the Sermon on the Mount and dismiss the holy rivalries of Spanish villages? Should we take St. Paul's condemnation of witchcraft as the last word on the matter, or should we find out what it is that European peasants have believed in the past and do believe now? I hope to show in this book that there is no 'yawning gap' between beliefs which Professor Zaehner might think 'superstitious' and the rarefied thought of the sectarian philosophies. These are connected not only in the minds of individual men but interlinked through social relations to constitute that whole which is inevitably hidden from the student of texts.

The desire to bring the people to the fore—Professor Zaehner's 'masses'—leads me to adopt a mode of presentation which is not that of the conventional ethnographic monograph. But I am urged towards this mode of presentation for an additional reason. I have written primarily for undergraduates, in sympathy with their often-voiced sense of the gulf between the formal analyses in their books and the life to which these relate. The very consistency, the rounded-off quality of the major monographs, often rouses a student's suspicion, irritation or frustration, as he endeavours to take imaginative grasp of the human reality and relate his own life to it. I have, therefore, tried to write a book about particular people whom I knew, in a deliberate attempt to lay the universals of human nature side by side with the particularities of an alien culture. I feel for the student who, reading about the Uborme people of the Uttatedyas delta,

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learns that they dote on their sisters' sons and give them yams, but gets no hint of how a man can loathe his sister's son or bitterly resent his mother's brother.

This book will have served its purpose if my account enables a student to understand better not only what people believe but also what they do not believe; how one man's faith is another's superstition, and that for every credulity there is also a doubt.

Finally I would stress that this is a book about a particular people, place and time. Had I given in to the temptation to underscore every observation with this caution it would have been very irritating for the reader. He must now guard himself against the assumption that general propositions are presented here about Gujarat or the whole of India.

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1

Introductory—Brothers are Rivals

The story that I want to tell is a commonplace one and I have deliberately let it ramble on occasion in the hope that, by the simple description of people and events, it will largely tell itself. I cannot, however, escape the double responsibility imposed by my involvement with the people concerned and the selection hidden beneath the very act of description. I must therefore give the reader an overall view of the book and my reasons for ordering it as I have.

The bulk of my material is derived from field-work among the Patidar, a caste of central Gujarat (see map below). I describe, in this introductory chapter, their internal organization and, more briefly, their relations with other castes. The discussion of organization leads me to observe that, although all the members of any caste are in theory equal, in fact they are very conscious of their standing in each other's eyes. Among the Patidar this consciousness is revealed most strongly in the matter of marriage.[1] As members of the same caste all Patidar can intermarry; as members of particular lineages and villages some marriage alliances are more prized than others; some are unthinkable. Even within one lineage, especially if it is a large one, some families may make, or wish to make, marriage alliances superior to those of their kinsmen. In order to do this they have to show the world that they are, in some ways, superior to these kinsmen. I describe the pressures operating for and against this desire for distinction:

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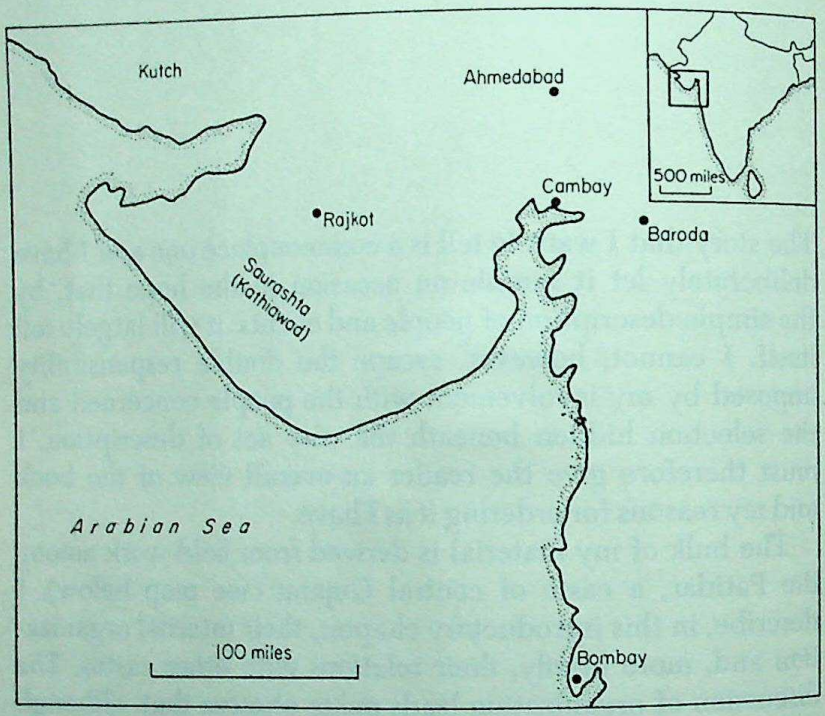
it is a real problem because a man is inescapably bound to his kinsmen as brothers and equals, and he is no less inescapably bound to seek the best for himself and his family.



The modern state of Gujarat comprises Kutch and the peninsula of Saurashta; it extends on the mainland from Mt. Abu to the north of Ahmedabad down the western seaboard of the Gulf of Cambay. The Patidar inhabit, for the most part, the area between Ahmedabad and Cambay.

After this introductory chapter I immediately enter into an account of a particular belief, the belief in the evil eye. The transition must seem abrupt: this belief, which I encountered in the early days of field-work, is symptomatic of a whole dimension of village life; it is particularly expressive of the conflict between the desire to do and be well and the fear of appearing superior. Naturally a man desires the good things of life but, if he achieves some of them, must he not

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fear the envious, evil eye of those who have not been so successful? There is no resolution of this dilemma short of the renunciation of all desire. The discussion of the evil eye concludes with a look at the belief in ghosts which, amongst other things, underscores the earth-bound quality of human wants and the dangers arising from their frustration.

In my third chapter I return to the problem of a group of families which is in the process of seeking distinction within a larger lineage. In doing this I discuss beliefs and actions about *mātā* which are the most prominent spirit beings of the village pantheon but not the most powerful. I describe how beliefs and rituals vary with the social aspirations of the villagers.

The account of *mātā* worship brings out facts which are initially strange to the western mind: the villagers believe that some spiritual beings are impure, for all that they are worshipped and closely related to the daily contingencies of village life. This leads me to show how a pantheon composed of pure and impure gods accords with a world in which pure and impure castes have a symbolic interdependence not only for necessary services but also for mutual definition. A caste defines its relative purity by the relative impurity of another. Once again, if in a different key, we encounter the theme of differentiation and superiority within a common humanity.

Very briefly and figuratively, chapter four can be described as the story of conflict between Shiva and Vishnu. The former, in association with the *mātā*, is seen as ruler of the world of hierarchy based on purity and impurity. The latter becomes, in this part of India, the leader pointing to a different kind of world. In this chapter I reconstruct, as best I can, the older cult of Shiva so that the reader can the better appreciate changes in belief and affiliation directed towards Vishnu.

Vaishnavism, the worship of Vishnu, is associated with the doctrine of divine love which is in essence egalitarian. It is expressed in the veneration of holy men, in hymns and, pre-eminently, in the sect. I discuss all these things in chapter

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five and, through the discussion of one powerful Vaishnavite sect, I try to show the way in which sects come into being.

The emergence of sects points to a profound paradox in this complex world. The holy man is one who has broken away from the world of desire and possessions, of status and discrimination, purity and impurity; the sect, which is inspired by his teaching, is fully involved in this very world that he has renounced.[2]

In chapter five I discuss this relation of sect to the world of caste. Here I give an account of a modern and influential Gujarati sect. I suggest that, more than any other, its teaching moves towards a break with the world of symbiosis. It accommodates the values of caste but tends to subordinate them to its authority.

In a brief concluding chapter I refer to a schismatic movement within this sect which has been able to carry the ascendancy over caste a step further. It has succeeded to such a degree that it now wins the adherence of the modern city dweller and the emigrant. The message of the holy man, unalloyed by the influence of caste, seems peculiarly fitted to those who have also, in their way, left the world of caste behind them.

A typical Indian village is inhabited by representatives of different castes: of these castes one, usually the largest, is referred to by social anthropologists as the dominant caste. It is called dominant not because it is necessarily the largest but because it owns the largest amount of land in the village and tends, therefore, to have a preponderant say in its politics. A caste which is dominant in one village is usually dominant in many neighbouring villages, and in this way we can refer to one caste as being the dominant caste of the whole area. Within a village the castes are thought of as living in separate areas. I say 'thought of' because this does not always correspond to the reality. A caste may have its local centre in the village but it is not rigidly confined to that area. Pressure on land and a variety of other circumstances

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oblige single families to live where there is space to build or where there is a house vacant. The only caste which one may expect to find firmly limited to its traditional area is the untouchable caste of the village and of the area.

The Patidar of Central Gujarat are in many respects a typical dominant caste and the villages in which they live correspond to the general pattern outlined. In their villages, however, the idea that castes inhabit separate areas is probably less in force than in villages elsewhere in India. This, I believe, is a result of the history of the Patidar and it will be necessary to say a little about how they have become the dominant caste in this part of Gujarat.

In the early nineteenth century, shortly after the British had moved into Gujarat, they reported the existence of an industrious agricultural caste called the Kanbi. Among these Kanbi some families were known as Patidar because they had a particular right granted to them by the Mogul government which enabled them to dispense with middle-men when paying their land tax. These Patidar families were, for the most part, centred in the Kaira District of Gujarat which is is also a very fertile tract of land. As a result of this fertility and of their privileges the Patidar very rapidly rose, in the course of the nineteenth century, to a position of relative affluence in the local society, and the very name Patidar came to have considerable prestige. Many Kanbi families, who had not in fact enjoyed this particular privilege, came to call themselves Patidar and thus associated themselves with their wealthier and more prestigious caste fellows. This is a process which is very common in India and we have many instances of titles which have become common names. There are, of course, analogous situations in our own society. As the name Patidar became more and more general in the caste so the old name Kanbi fell increasingly into disrepute. By the time of the 1931 census the word Patidar was so commonly used in this caste, and the name Kanbi had become so opprobrious that it was officially discontinued and

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the caste came to be known as Patidar. The Patidar were, and still are, recognised as holding the highest status under the Brahmans in the local hierarchy of this part of Gujarat.

I have compressed into a few lines a development which took place over a hundred years and inevitably this makes for simplification. When one speaks of a caste as being dominant one very often gives the impression that it is, so to speak, uniformly dominant throughout the area. One tends to give the impression that each of its members is as wealthy and as prestigious as the others. This is a very misleading impression. As the overall condition of the caste improved, the original Patidar families of the early nineteenth century maintained, for the greater part, their position in relation to other families. When we survey the Patidar caste today, therefore, we find that, although as a caste it occupies a very high place in the local hierarchy, it has within it considerable variation in economic and social conditions. There are Patidar families who live in large, almost palatial, houses, and who, by any standards, enjoy a high standard of living. At the other end of the scale there are Patidar whose sole territorial possession is the mud hut in which they live, who work as labourers in the fields of other Patidar, and whose standard of living does not rise above the subsistence level. Such people can only be said to enjoy status in the eyes of other castes by association with their wealthier caste fellows. Although such people enjoy a certain prestige, it would be absurd to say that they were as effectively dominant as a wealthy caste fellow who owned enough land to grow substantial cash crops like tobacco and cotton as well as his own food crops. Such a wealthy Patidar might also have direct interest in a business in Bombay or Ahmedabad or an indirect interest through a kinsman. In general he would have patronage and power as well as a variety of interests to preserve and expand. Even a Patidar in what we might call the middle range of the caste, who had a sufficiency of land to produce his own food, and perhaps a small amount of cash crops, would not necessarily

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find himself in a position of unchallenged political and economic superiority over a member of another caste. To take the most common and effective form of patronage that we find at the village level as an index of a man's potential power over others, such a man in the middle range would probably neither need nor be in a position to hire the labour of others.

I believe that it is because the Patidar have risen from low to high status in a relatively short period of time, and also because this rise in status has not been reflected by a uniform advance in economic conditions throughout the caste that the Patidar do not, by and large, maintain those master–servant relationships with other castes known elsewhere in India as *jajmāni* relationships. If other accounts are to be believed, although I suspect that an element of romanticism has crept into some of them, the castes of areas and therefore of villages are inter-linked by traditional service relationships of various kinds. The families of the dominant caste are represented as lords of the manor, who, in return for the protection and food they provide for their dependants, receive a variety of services from the priest, from the potter, barber, carpenter and so on. Traditionally these relationships are relationships between families and are inherited so that the son of a carpenter has a right to serve the son of his father's master. The value of such a right is considerable in a country where under-employment is chronic. To have a patron meant, traditionally, not only that one would not starve, but also that one could expect political protection, interest-free loans and other benefits. There is some evidence that a few of the wealthy original Patidar families settled families of these specialized castes in their villages with, presumably, the intention of establishing the kind of traditional system which I have outlined. Thus in the past power was converted into status as the wealthy landlord created his own caste hierarchy beneath him. But among the descendants of such families today there is very little evidence of it; among the majority of Patidar there is no tradition of such relationships and little

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evidence of interest in them. A Patidar who can afford it will employ the barber in his village or the washerman or, if he has need, a carpenter, but I have rarely found any belief that such relationships are tied or hereditary or, indeed, that they entail rights and duties going beyond the particular service contracted for at a particular moment. A man may well use the local washerman for the most part, but when he wishes to have his clothes cleaned for some special occasion he can take them to the local town without incurring guilt or the criticism of his neighbours. In general, among the Patidar, I found that the word *jajmān* was either not known or completely misunderstood.

Other dominant castes in India must have, according to their size, the same range of economic variation within them as the Patidar. I do not think that the relative disinterest which the Patidar display in maintaining traditional patterns of dependence is to be related directly to the fact that a large part, if not the majority, of the caste is incapable of maintaining such relationships on a large scale, although, no doubt, this is a supporting factor. I would attribute their indifference rather to the relative speed with which they have risen in the local hierarchy and the period in which that rise took place, a period which saw the introduction and the spread of Western secular values and materialism.

The Patidar are also indifferent to another appurtenance of high status—the famous sacred thread of the Hindu. According to the sacred literature this is one of the marks of the twice-born and therefore something to be acquired by members of a caste having pretensions of high status in traditional Indian society. We have evidence from other places in India, and from other times, that castes whose members were not in the habit of wearing this thread persuaded Brahmans to invest them with it once they began to change their ideas about their place in the traditional society, in other words, as they began to rise in the local hierarchy. The Patidar, however, appear for the greater part to have been

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totally indifferent to an external sign which, throughout India and for centuries, has been regarded as the distinctive external sign of the high caste man. Even quite poor and uneducated Patidar felt free to describe the custom to me as the Gujarat equivalent of 'a load of old rubbish'. In this connexion I might add another feature which makes the Patidar somewhat atypical among dominant castes in India. In those areas where the traditional *jajmāni* relationships are reported it is usual to find that one particular caste tends to call upon the services of one particular Brahman caste for the performance of its family rituals, notably marriage. The higher a caste is in the local hierarchy, the more it will tend towards this kind of exclusiveness. Among the Patidar I find no such relation. There are many Brahman castes in Gujarat and some are congregated more in some areas than in others, and for this reason the Patidar of those areas are more likely to call upon them than upon others. But I never heard that it was a mark of superior status to be served by this Brahman rather than that and, indeed, in one and the same village, if more than one Brahman caste was represented there, the different Patidar families would call upon the services of either with indifference.

This all relates back, I believe, to the relative lack of caste segregation in the village. When I compare the Patidar with more orthodox, or traditionally minded, castes in Western Gujarat and in Kutch, I would say that they are considerably less concerned with their status *vis-à-vis* other castes; on the other hand each head of a Patidar family is more concerned with his standing *vis-à-vis* other Patidar.

This brings us to the internal organization of the caste. I have already said that there is considerable variety of economic and social conditions among the Patidar. This variety tends to be reflected in each village in which the Patidar live but, nevertheless, one can say that the economic condition of one village or a cluster of villages is relatively uniform in relation to another village or cluster of villages.

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In this way we can refer to an economic hierarchy within the caste such that there is, at the top, a group of wealthy and prestigious villages and at the bottom a larger number of poor villages. The poorer Patidar can lay claim to high status only by nominal association with their caste fellows and have none of the resources or appurtenances which their wealthier caste fellows enjoy.

This economic hierarchy is recognized by the Patidar and reflected in the pattern of their marriages. There is a widespread belief among the rural population, supported by the ancient Sanskrit legal literature, that the family of the bride is inferior to the family of the groom. The emphasis upon this belief, and the extent to which it is reflected in the organization of their social life, vary from caste to caste. In some castes it is what we should call a 'token' belief, limited to a ritual expression and having no further implication for the two families concerned. But among the Patidar the belief is strong and supports the economic hierarchy. The quality of the marriages which a man is able to contract on behalf of his daughters reflects very considerably upon his own standing. From the earliest reports in the nineteenth century up to the present time it is clear that the desire to marry his daughter well amounts to an obsession for the average Patidar father. Still today a man will count his life well spent if he has married his daughters into families having a superior standing to his own, even if he has bankrupted himself in the process. The greater the disparity between the standing of the bride's family and that of the groom, the greater will be the dowry which the girl's father must pay; although few can afford enormous dowries bridging over great differences in social standing, each man strives to contract for his daughter a marriage alliance with a family somewhat superior to his own. There is, therefore, an inevitability of expense.

Given the economic difference between and within villages, it follows that marriage into certain villages carries more prestige than marriage into others. But, and the Patidar

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themselves recognize this, the word village here is used as a convenient shorthand to refer to a cluster of lineages which go to make up the Patidar population of that village. This becomes clear enough when I say that not every single Patidar family in a village necessarily participates in the overall reputation of that village. In very poor villages there may be relatively well-to-do men who are in a position to accumulate sufficient money to contract marriages far outside the range of their fellow villagers. Similarly even in the most aristocratic villages there are slum areas inhabited by families and whole lineages of impoverished Patidar. No one would seek out a marriage alliance with such families simply because they happened to live in that particular village.

The reference to lineages suggests that the Patidar attach great significance to the value of descent, and this is true. It may seem paradoxical therefore when I say that the impoverished lineages, or families, may well be as legitimately descended from the founder of the village as the highest ranking lineage within it. It is by no means unusual to find that even the senior, most ancient, lineage in the village is at the same time the poorest and the least respected. The apparent paradox arises from a failure on our part to understand the Patidar problem which emerges from a conflict in their values. They do indeed attach great importance to what, in our society, we call 'social mobility'. We may put the matter briefly by saying that a Patidar prides himself as a social person on two counts which may be contradictory: on the one hand he looks to the past, to his father and to his father's fathers; on the other hand he looks to the future and to the superior status which his grandchildren will have by virtue of the marriage which he has contracted for their mother. There is considerable evidence to indicate that the circumstances of modern life favour the latter value and that, although the Patidar continue to speak of lineages, the generation depth of lineages has shrunk in the course of this century as their number has increased. In the past we might

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find the Patidar of one village distributed among, say, three lineages each one named after a distant ancestor. Today, with increasing rapidity, small sections of three or four generations' depth, and even individual families, establish separate social identities for themselves in order to contract superior marriages. Briefly, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that any Patidar who is in a position to do so acts as though he would be the founder of a new lineage; his hopes are frustrated by the fact that his own sons share, individually, the same ambition.

The genealogy between pages 16 and 17 records the descent and marriage details of the largest lineage in the village of Sundarana in the Kaira District of Gujarat. It illustrates, economically, much of what I have been saying, and at the same time it introduces the village from which the bulk of the material in this book is drawn. The lineage is known collectively as the Prabhu Lakhujivalla after the founding father Prabhu, the son of Lakhu. The bulk of its population inhabits one sector of the village, but there are some families quite separated from it, in particular the descendants of Vallabh to whom I shall return in a moment. As is clear from the chart, Prabhu Lakhuji had five sons of whom Kālidās was the eldest and Vallabh the youngest. From the sons of Prabhu Lakhuji is descended a population, with their wives and children, of well over three hundred, but in the eyes of their fellow villagers there are only two sections which are significant. On the one hand they see the descendants of Kālidās, Kuvar, Mitha and Kāshiyā and on the other are the descendants of Vallabh.

Even to the outside observer the grounds of this distinction are obvious. The area in which the former group lives is a squalid and congested one, the dwellings are for the most part small wattle and daub huts and the pathways which connect them are narrow, and thick with mud. A family of five people, that I know well, lives in a narrow room six yards by three, the grandfather's half of a division between two

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brothers made thirty years ago. The Prabhu Lakhuji section is to the south-east of Sundarana, one of the oldest inhabited areas of the village. The descendants of Vallabh live, for the most part, in the recently developed south-west section. The very phrase 'recently developed' gives immediately an index of their social condition: the typical situation is for a growing population to confine itself in the same area by division and sub-division of property. The fact that an area can be said to be recently developed implies that its owners have a superfluity of land on which they can afford to build, not to mention the financial resources to cover the cost of materials and buildings. The descendants of Vallabh live in small but solid brick houses with small courtyards and sufficient stabling room for at least two buffalo. They cultivate their own lands, but are in a position to hire extra labour at sowing time and at harvest; their best clothes are not the same as their working clothes; their children are healthy and their young men do not yet show the signs of incipient muscle wastage which prematurely ages their cousins in the older quarter. The difference between these two sections is rather marked and perhaps more so than is commonly the case. For this very reason it provides a good example of the kind of thing which is happening all the time in Patidar villages.

It would be quite impossible to give the individual history of each family which has contributed to the present state of affairs, and obviously there are those incalculable factors which we lump together under the heading of luck. Nevertheless there are certain basic facts which will, other circumstances favouring, set a family on the road to good fortune, and others which, without favouring circumstances, forbode almost certain hardship. For example, if a man has many daughters and few or no sons, it means that he is obliged to spend on the dowries of his daughters and has no hope of recouping his financial position through dowries which sons receive. On the other hand, of course, a man who has several sons and few or no daughters is in a very advantageous

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position. When there is only one son in the family and when this situation is repeated regularly in the course of a few generations, the family is normally in rather prosperous circumstances. In other families, where there is more than one son, the property will almost certainly be divided, and it must be divided equally between the sons not long after the father's death. A family which is not subject to such division not merely preserves its property entire, but is more likely to be in a position to increase it.

Here we have another of the inevitable contradictions of peasant life in India. The more sons a man has the prouder he is and, among the Patidar, the more his financial position is likely to be very satisfactory as a result. At the same time, the more sons there are the greater is the risk of fragmentation of the family land into small, scarcely viable, plots of ground. Those who have some wealth can, of course, invest it, and the education of his children is probably one of the most common investments for the Indian villager. The particular good fortune of the descendants of Vallabh has been that they owned land on that side of the village nearest to the wealthy Dharmaj where some Patidar families had established an irrigation business and were interested in establishing one of their pumps on Sundarana land. Some of the descendants of Vallabh came in with the Dharmaj Patidar as partners in an irrigation works and others of them found regular employment in the works. This new situation provided immediate and obvious economic benefits in a society in which few are assured of a regular weekly wage but it also provided the intangible and more traditional benefits of wealthy patronage by the Dharmaj partners. The descendants of Vallabh were now in a position to put in a good word for their kinsmen, not only for employment in the local irrigation works, but also in a large range of small-scale industries owned in Dharmaj.

What has still to be understood, however, is how and why the descendants of Vallabh are separating themselves from the larger body. It is easier to answer the second question

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first. The reason why the descendants of Vallabh wish to be dissociated from all the other descendants of Prabhu Lakhuji is that they want to have a separate identity in marriage negotiations. If they continue to be included within the larger group, then any inferior marriage or low behaviour reflects upon all the members of that group: that such 'inferior' customs as widow-remarriage and the employment of the family's womenfolk in field labour are only the product of poverty is not weighed in the account. The descendants of Vallabh can scarcely hope to get their daughters married well, with relatively low dowries, and also to receive substantial dowries from their daughters-in-law, so long as they are associated in the public mind with such a large group of relatively inferior Patidar.

There is nothing formal or sudden about the process of segmentation. Each of the groups descended from one of the sons of Prabhu Lakhuji has, so to speak, its own identity, and the members of each such group have some sense of kinship closer than that which they share with the entire lineage. The solidarity of such groupings in no way threatens the identity of the entire lineage any more than the solidarity of one particular family within it might be said to do so. Some anthropologists, adopting a kind of shorthand, sometimes give the impression that a clan, a tribe or a lineage splits up in some mysterious ways analogous to the splitting off of cells in a biological process. Even those who appreciate the role of the individual in such social processes all too often tend to impute motivation to him, and suggest that all his actions, seen with the wisdom of hindsight, are directed towards the end finally achieved—the setting up of a relatively autonomous group. For people who have first-hand experience of such situations the whole account is imbued with a sense of unreality. For this reason I describe, as best I can, the history of the growth of heightened identity among the descendants of Vallabh.

The very fact that the descendants of Vallabh live apart

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from the traditional area of the lineage indicates some earlier inferiority. Had they been people of substance they would in the past have owned sufficient territory in the traditional area to maintain themselves there. The fact that today they occupy a recently inhabited area suggests that they were earlier driven out as a result of political or economic pressure, conceivably both. But for favouring circumstances, notably their proximity to the wealthy developers of Dharmaj, there is no reason to suppose that they would be in a position to establish themselves as a separate group today. It is not even the case that all the different families who are descended from Vallabh have independent resources of their own. In fact there seem to be only two men of substance in the group who have diffused their prestige and to a certain extent their economic benefits throughout the whole. These two are Kishor (1) and Hāthi (2).[3] The latter is an only son whose father invested rather more than was usual at the time in his education. He is the only man in the village who possesses a radio and regularly receives a daily newspaper. He is a source of information about the world at large, and very much a counsellor for most people in the village when they have dealings with the local bureaucracy or government. The former owned less land originally. If we assume, as is indeed likely, that the property has been equally divided from generation to generation according to traditional Hindu law, we can see from the genealogy that Kishor has inherited only a third as much land as Hāthi and, indeed, is lucky in that he had no brother with whom he would have had to divide his inheritance. Kishor left the village when he was a young man and worked in Bombay, where he acquired some basic knowledge of machinery, and only returned in his late twenties. His great good fortune is that it was his land which was chosen for the establishment of the irrigation works. I might add that he had to fight for the right to dispose of his land to the Dharmaj Patidar as his fellow villagers resented this intrusion of outsiders. By a mixture of force and dip-

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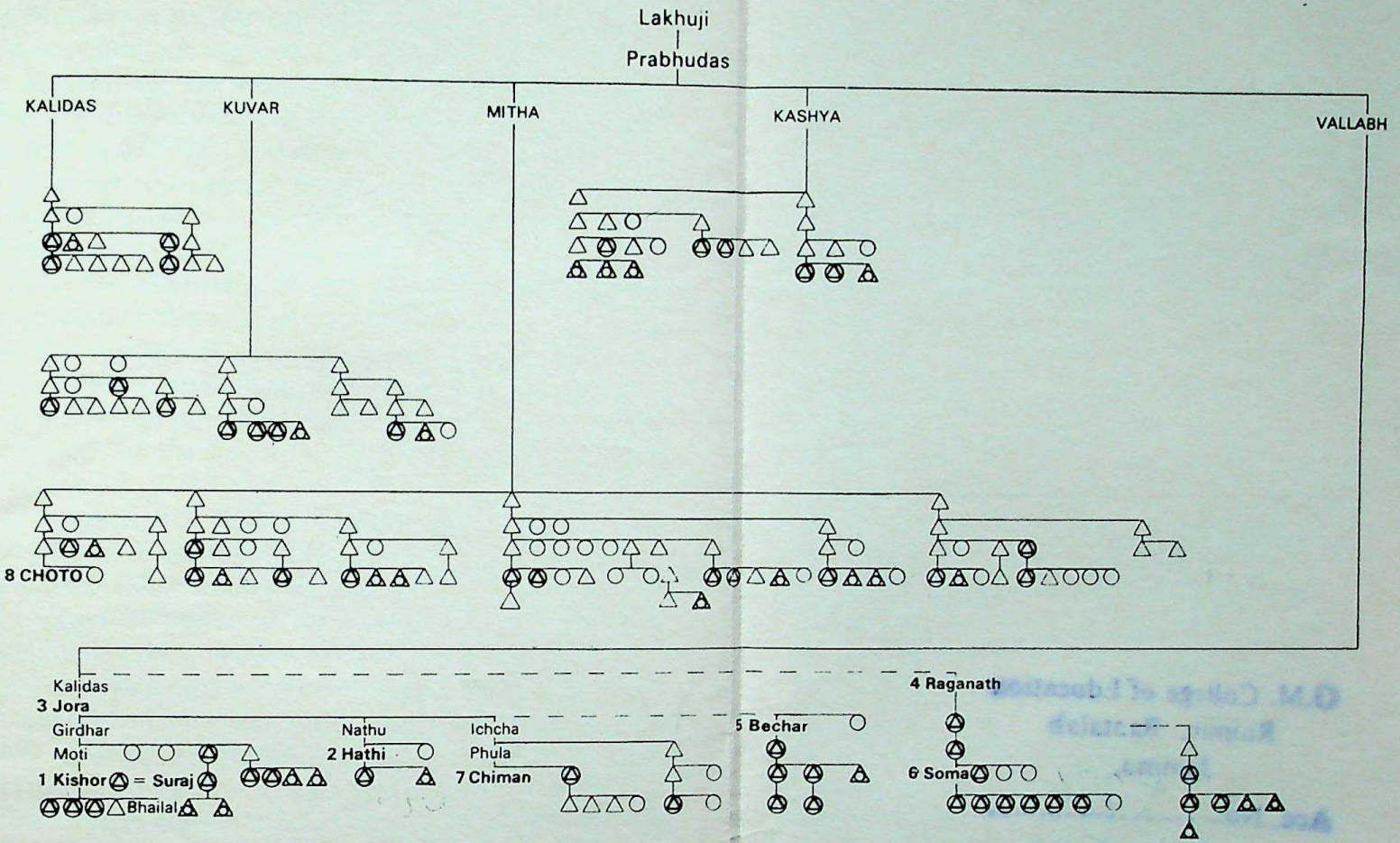
Schematic Genealogy of the Prabhudas Lakhujiwalla of Sundarana Village*



CODE

△ or ○ a marriage of male or female respectively, within the circle of Seven Villages ; see pp. 15 and 16

△ or ○ a male or female person respectively, either married outside the Seven Villages or unmarried

– – – – a lineal connection which is accepted, but not genealogically demonstrable

* Genealogies show *social* not *biological* generation. This is a pity because, the size of the rural Indian family and, more important, the incidence of infantile mortality often make for a much wider gap between eldest and youngest brother than is common in our society. From the above genealogy the reader might suppose that Kishor (1) is much younger than Hathi (2): in fact Kishor is slightly older than Hathi. This is because Hathi's father, Nathu, was so much younger than his brother Girdhar, that he approximated in age to his nephew Moti, Kishor's father. Similarly, Choto (8) appears to be older than Kishor: in fact Kishor is some thirty years the elder

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lomacy, by, for example, providing free clean water to the villagers, Kishor established himself as the manager of the irrigation works in partnership with the Dharmaj Patidar. He is now in a position not only to give jobs in the irrigation works, but, through the receipt of a regular salary, to increase his property at the expense of less well-to-do fellow villagers. Kishor has, in addition, five sons and no daughters and has every prospect of receiving fairly substantial dowries with his daughters-in-law whose fathers would be happy to be associated with so well placed a man.

It would be misleading to suppose that either Kishor or Hāthi, or both of them, at any point has sat down and considered the strategy of secession. It is rather the case that secession is forced upon them, not only by the expectation of their own kinsmen but also by the expectation which all the villagers have of the behaviour appropriate to a relatively wealthy man.

It so happens that Kishor is married to a rather mean woman who does not enjoy keeping the kind of open house which several other women in the village do. Nevertheless she is obliged by virtue of her husband's standing in the village to maintain a certain standard and cannot, at least publicly, indulge in some of the economies which she would prefer. In addition to maintaining a generally higher standard of living in day-to-day affairs she is obliged to observe various ritual occasions from which, if her husband were not earning so well, she might well be excused. This means that she must prepare and distribute certain sweets on special occasions, holy days and the like, and on any special occasion which normally might be celebrated by the family alone she must invite at least one representative from each of the houses occupied by the descendants of Vallabh.

There is a convention—one cannot call it more than that—among the villagers that the group constituted by the descendants of a great-grandfather is a convenient one for celebrations and sharing. If a man is celebrating a particularly

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good tobacco harvest, shall we say, he can invite the members of this group without causing any offence to other people in the village. This and similar occasions are contrasted very much with the big and formal occasions of marriage and death. On such occasions a man is expected to invite a much wider group, and his failure either to invite, or to attend, on such an occasion is evidence on his part that he no longer wishes to be associated with the wider group. Such action has not been taken by the descendants of Vallabh in relation to their wider lineage, and I doubt whether any such action would be taken deliberately. One would expect rather that just as a man feels no great obligation to invite a kinsman connected by five generations to a domestic celebration so, as the generations which separate the descendants of Vallabh from the descendants of Prabhu Lakhuji increase, the relationship will gradually wither away.

It would be considered very arrogant, rude and not at all befitting a man of status to spurn his poorer relatives in this way. Nevertheless, I was told of several occasions in other villages where, as one particular family or section of a lineage increased in wealth and thereby in the lavishness of its entertainment and the like, so other relatives became more and more ashamed about receiving hospitality which they could in no way return. There is a rather pleasing irony in the situation in that the wealthier relative by apparent hospitality and generosity can be said, almost literally, to choke off his poorer relatives with whom he would prefer not to be associated. The action of separation and therefore the blame, if there is any, falls upon the poorer relative and not upon the wealthy man. But this is to take a cynical and an outsider's view of the matter. Given the values of Patidar society a good man who is in a position to do so, simply by being hospitable and helpful, emerges to a position of eminence in his society with which poorer relatives cannot compete. Kishor and Hāthi are men of substance for the entire population of the village regardless of caste, and it is

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inevitable therefore that the four generations from Vallabh's grandson Jora should, from the villagers' point of view, naturally participate in their substance.

What, however, of the families descended from Ragnāth (4) and Bechar (5) who are accepted as descendants of Vallabh, but whose exact connexion is not known either by themselves or by the group with which we have been dealing? Both groups exemplify the apparently astonishing indifference of some Patidar to genealogical details once these cease to have social significance for them. We can certainly say that the fact that neither group recalls, with any certainty, its connexion with Vallabh, is an indication that the prosperity of the descendants of the latter is a relatively recent occurrence. We may be sure that if the descendants of Vallabh do come to be known as a completely separate group within the village these, at present, dissociated lineages will establish the exact connexion.

In order to understand their association among the descendants of Vallabh we might look at the more general reaction of the descendants of Prabhu Lakhuji to their wealthier kinsmen. First of all, they not only like to count among their number such distinguished kinsmen as Kishor and Hāthi, it is also advantageous to them when negotiating marriages with families in other villages to be able to point to such kinsmen. In some villages the very number of brick houses, as opposed to mud huts, is a matter of pride to people, even though they have never been invited into such houses, nor stand any chance of ever being invited. From this point of view the descendants of Prabhu Lakhuji must wish all success to the descendants of Vallabh, to the extent that they hope to participate in their honour. But they recognize that if the descendants of Vallabh really do establish themselves as a separate social identity in the eyes of other villages, then this can only be done at the expense of their association with Prabhu Lakhuji. On these grounds and for more immediately practical reasons they have no desire to offend Kishor, Hāthi

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and their kinfolk. The descendants of Vallabh, for their part, are not yet sufficiently large in number nor really so influential that they can afford to flout the relationship with the wider lineage, even should they wish to do so, which is improbable. Nevertheless to appear well in their own eyes, in the eyes of their kinsmen and, perhaps more important of all, in the eyes of their affines and potential affines, they must to a certain extent distinguish themselves in the literal sense of the word. In setting themselves up they have need of the increased numbers which the two separated lineages add to their group and also the lineal value which the name Vallabh has by virtue of its relative antiquity. A group of this size and generation depth is in no way remarkable, its members would not normally be referred to as *kulin*, people of lineage and blood. Such a claim could only rest upon a genealogy of at least six generations and preferably more. There is nobody, as I recall, of any particular distinction in these 'separated' lineages although we may note that Somā (6) has six very well married sons, only one daughter and is presumably a man of some substance. The advantages to these lineages of the association under the name of Vallabh are obvious, and need not be repeated.

One whole aspect of this nascent secession cannot be dealt with here, and is not over-obvious from the genealogy. The village of Sundarana belongs to a group of seven villages which, over the generations, have increasingly come to intermarry more amongst themselves than with other villages. Recently this informal association has been formalized. Now members who marry either sons or daughters outside the circle of the seven incur quite substantial fines. The names of the seven villages in addition to Sundarana are Ardi, Bhārel, Jor, Morad, Vānskilyā and Vatāv.

An analysis of the genealogy would show that these names occur with increasing frequency as we approach the present generation. But even the most casual inspection shows that, in many families, marriages have recently been contracted

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outside the circle of these seven. In fact, marriage inside the circle is still largely a matter of ideal to be achieved, and to a certain extent a matter of prestige—not something that everybody can afford. And, among those who do marry among the seven, some marry well and some not so well. To take the genealogy in front of us as an example, a man from another village in the seven who married his daughter into the lineage of Vallabh would consider himself, and be considered, to have affines superior to somebody who had married his daughter into a less prestigious lineage of the same village. But a man who had *received* a daughter from the lineage of Vallabh, who had, so to speak, 'scored' according to the rules of hypergamy over an already prestigious lineage, would be considered yet more superior. As a result of this marriage alliance he, if he had daughters, would be in a position to marry them off to good families with a dowry somewhat less than he would have expected to pay had he not contracted such an alliance. What does not emerge from the genealogy is the *quality* of the marriages which the descendants of Vallabh have contracted. It must be accepted here that the lineages in the other villages to which they have allied themselves have status in those villages somewhat similar to their own. Another fact which is not apparent is that where they have married their women into villages outside the circle these outside villages tend to have an overall superior status to the villages of the circle of seven. Although such marriages have been followed by the payment of a fine, the alliances still reflect some honour on the men who contracted them. It is even true to say that the very capacity to pay the fine and not be financially embarrassed by it gives credit to a man. His fellows adopt an ambiguous attitude towards him somewhat similar to that adopted by the other descendants of Prabhu Lakhuji to the potential secession of Vallabh's group. They disapprove of the separatist action and at the same time enjoy, and benefit by, the reflected glory. A good affinal relationship established by any member of the village,

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wherever the affines may be located, establishes for his fellow villagers the *possibility* of following up that alliance by another, *possibly* at somewhat reduced expense. However, it seems that, for the present, the idea that the good marriage should take place within the circle of the seven holds as an ideal for all the members of the village, even though there are some who have not been able to achieve it or to achieve it in its entirety. Those fathers in inferior lineages who hope to marry a daughter or a son among the seven will look to their kinsmen among the descendants of Vallabh to put in a good word for them among their own affines; since the affines of the descendants of Vallabh are influential men in their own villages they can do much to make or to prevent a marriage contract.

The Patidar peasantry are much concerned with self-improvement and so with change. The Patidar of Sundarana do not, admittedly, conceive of an entirely new structure of human relationships, but they are very ready to embrace the idea of constant reorganization of the relationships within that structure. They are fully conscious also, that in order to improve his condition a man, a family, or an entire caste, must abandon certain customs and take on certain others. In this sense they can be said to live historically. Over against the traditional image of the Indian peasant locked in the cage of unchanging ordinances, they freely use the very common word *sudhāravuṅ*—a term which can best be translated 'to better oneself' or 'to improve'. But improvement is always at someone else's expense. This effect flows from the principle of hierarchy which governs all classification in traditional India.

A comparison with our own way of thinking should make this clear. Our societies in the West are governed by the ideal of equality. Particularly when we talk about international economics, there is sometimes an underlying assumption that all the societies of the world are working towards some kind of balance, a state of fair shares for all. In order to preserve this fantasy, to the extent that we think about it all, we assume

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either that development of technology in the West will slow down or stop, or that its progressive achievements will, in some miraculous way, be instantaneously diffused to the ends of the earth and the fruits simultaneously enjoyed by the entire population of the world. Many of our plans and policies are ostensibly devised in the light of this quite unrealistic vision. The reader has only to consider how impossible, and even repulsive, he would find any alternative, to realize that we are at a stage in the history of our thought at which we cannot even entertain the idea of institutionalized and permanent inequality. This, as Louis Dumont has emphasized, is the fundamental difference between India and the West.

For the Patidar the idea of the good life implies immediately superiority, superiority over someone else. Moreover, when a man has achieved a position of relative affluence, he does not suppose that those whom he has left behind now unite in offering him generous congratulations, and acquiesce in the inferiority for themselves which his elevation implies. Here another classical image, of the lowly Indian peasant humbly accepting that station in life to which his *karma* has brought him, must be abandoned. The ambivalent attitude of kinsmen towards those who are in the process of secession, or who have seceded, sufficiently indicates that the real situation is more complex than it is commonly presented.

At the lower levels of the caste hierarchy, below the Patidar, that is to say, one finds the same ambivalence of attitude expressed more extremely. Among the Untouchables, for example, there is a real hatred of the Patidar, shot through with envy. Unable as yet to conceive an entirely different order of things they must admire those who have what they lack, and this turns hatred into a resentful acquiescence. If the doctrine of *karma* explains human misfortune it provides no comfort. There are, however, other doctrines which speak of individuality and of equality. Over against the belief in

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an anonymous soul passing from birth to birth, there is set the conception of the individualized soul capable of choosing and clinging to a divine lord: thus liberation from the cycle of rebirth, *moksha,* is achieved.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account of the Patidar and the significance of marriage, see my *Kanbi and Patidar*, Clarendon Press, 1972.
2. For the authoritative statement on this, see L. Dumont, 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, ed. Dumont and Pocock, No. VIII (Mouton, 1965); reprinted in Louis Dumont, *Religion/Politics, and History in India*, Mouton, 1970.
3. Numbers in brackets relate to the genealogy between pp. 16 and 17.

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2

The Evil Eye—Envy and Greed

Momad[1] put on my raincoat and a large 1930s style trilby hat, known as a double-crowned Terai, and, looking to my eyes rather sinister, pranced up the lane to the village. Ten minutes later he was back, crestfallen and carrying the coat over his arm. 'What happened?' I asked. 'Oh it's Surajben' he said, 'she told me to take it off.' 'But why?' I asked. 'Well,' he said, 'people would think I looked too beautiful.' I had scarcely been in the village a month at this time. Why on earth Momad should be thought beautiful in a hat and coat several sizes too large, and badly travel-stained, I could not imagine. 'But why, Momad?' I persisted 'Why shouldn't you look beautiful?' 'People,' he said, 'people would think that these are fine things.' 'But so what if they do?' 'Well,' he replied, 'some people believe I would fall ill—it is *najar*.'

The word *najar*, which in this context I translate as the evil eye, is also in common use with less dramatic meanings such as a 'look', as in 'have a look', or 'sight', as in 'short-sighted'. Before I discuss its malevolent significance any further let me give a more detailed example. This concerns the same Surajben, the wife of Momad's patron in the village, Kishor, and whom Momad, although a Muslim, addressed affectionately as *māsi*—mother's sister.

Some months after the incident of the raincoat Surajben gave birth to her fifth son, Bhailal. Very soon afterwards the baby came out in a rash, which made it fretful and wretched.

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Surajben took him to the dispensary in Petlad and followed the doctor's instructions about bathing, powdering and the like. Momad and I went for a walk the evening after she returned from Petlad. 'You remember we were talking about *najar*?' he said. 'Yes, of course.' 'Well, Surajben thinks that Bhailal has been struck by it.' 'Oh really—what's she going to do about it?' I asked. 'She's done it already,' said Momad. He told me that Surajben had put some chillies and a scrap of the child's hair into a small brass bowl. On to these she had put a hot coal and inverted the bowl on a flat metal eating dish. Over this she had poured liquid buffalo dung. The bowl could not then be lifted and this had proved to her that the child was suffering from *najar*. Apparently a less elaborate test would have been to wave chillies round the child's head and throw them in the fire. If the gas from the chillies had escaped there would have been no *najar*, and another cause for the sickness would have had to be found. 'So the baby is suffering from *najar*?' I said, 'what does she do now?' 'We shall have to wait and see,' said Momad.

Within two days things were a little clearer. Surajben's husband's second cousin, Chiman (7), had no children. It seems that he had visited Surajben shortly after the child was born and made some comment about the way it could already move its eyes and notice things. Surajben had decided that this was the source of *najar*. You do not accuse people to their faces in such matters and, indeed, it is usually assumed that the guilty party is unaware of the damage done. Surajben therefore embarked on the following course of treatment: she made a point of visiting more frequently with her husband's kinsman and of inviting him to her house as well. As often as possible she would give him the child to hold; he, frankly fond of children, was always happy to hold it. Surajben was very pleased with the results. She had put a black thread round the baby's neck, as most mothers do by way of added precaution, but by giving the child a daily dose, so to speak, of Chiman's *najar*, its power diminished.

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The baby was allegedly always very ill after each treatment, but progressively less and less so, until finally the rash disappeared entirely.

When I saw Bhailal three years later, he was a very healthy and remarkably well-built little boy. Like all mothers who fear the envy of others, Surajben had deprived him of the formal appearances of care. Apart from the black thread with its little brass amulet he wore nothing, and his bleached brown hair grew to his shoulders. Surajben said that he was five years old, and therefore it was five years since I had visited them. I did not argue; Bailhal certainly looked a healthy five-year-old.

Najar, the evil eye, is the eye of envy, and it is an inevitable feature of a world in which men set store by looks, or health, or goods, or any pleasant thing. Even if, as is likely, one sets no store by one's mere subsistence, the very deprivations of others give grounds for fear. Since there is no one who cannot find someone whose plight is in some way worse than his own, so there is no one who is completely immune to envy and so to *najar*. Let me describe some typical *najar* situations. Doors should always be closed while eating otherwise hungry men may look in. Thus if one is eating out of doors, for example in the fields, and someone passes, one should offer him food. If food is offered, and can be accepted on caste grounds, some, be it only a little, should be eaten to demonstrate good will. A man in the village once suffered a fever because when he was drinking tea outside his house a stranger to whom he offered some, had refused it. The fever was only cured after he had given a coconut to the goddess. The stranger in this case was presumed to be deliberately malevolent—*melo manas* (literally—a dirty man). A woman was once feeding her child and looked at it with great affection. Her mother-in-law, fearing for the child, suddenly directed the young woman's attention to the stone flour-mill, which immediately broke in half. Here there is no question of envy, but of permanent evil eye unconsciously exercised.

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Envy enters only when we realize that it was the mother-in-law who spread the story through the village![2] A man bought a new hookah of the portable kind and was walking back from the town with it. A passer-by asked him where he had bought it, and it broke at once. A woman had a child and another asked to see it. It died. Whenever you feel that someone is looking at you, immediately pretend to take great interest in some worthless object, and so direct his attention towards that.

Although *najar* can run freely wherever there are human values, it is to a certain extent limited by a kind of realism. My battered hat and stained raincoat together with other marvels such as my typewriter, were not dangerous to me, as far as I could understand, any more than a landlord who lived in a village nearby had anything to fear from his silk shirts. *Najar* seems to be apprehended more from those with whom one is, in most other respects, equal, or has reason to expect to be. In a society governed by hierarchical principles in which status is given by birth, some seem to be naturally in a more favoured position than oneself, and one would not regard their superiority as a deprivation. This seems quite reasonable to me. We also do not really envy, that is truly covet, something which is not within our reach. What affect us more closely are the things which seem to just elude our grasp—the things which are only just better than the things we have, and with which, therefore, we can compare them.

The range of *najar* is limited, therefore, by the nature of caste society, which accords a status to each group, and by the weakness of human imagination, which reduces the number of material desires to the scale of existing material goods. But clearly there are other human goods which are neither accorded by caste nor beyond the range of any human being to conceive, such as health, beauty, popularity and the like: to this extent all men are vulnerable to all men.

On the face of it this seems an absurd situation: it means that no one can enjoy the very simplest and common joys of

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life because of a constant anxiety that he is exciting the envy of someone else. Actually something like this can happen.

I was in another village, in the house of a relatively wealthy man who had been very good to me. I will call him Swāmidās because he was a devoted servant—*das*—of Swāmi Narāyan, the deified founder of a Gujarat sect. We were sitting outside his front door one evening, looking out on the small courtyard into which the door of a poorer kinsman's house also opened. After a pause in our conversation he suddenly voiced his train of thought and said, 'I *would* like to buy that house, but it's difficult.' 'But what on earth do you want it for, Swāmidās?' I asked. 'Well, you know, my children play out here, they play with the children from that house and it makes difficulties.' I remained silent. 'You see,' said Swāmidās, 'sometimes I give my boys something nice—like an apple from Bombay, and the other children see it and of course they would like an apple too.'

Swāmidās was dreaming out loud because there was no real likelihood that his kinsmen would sell their ancestral home. I do not think that, even if it had been possible, he would have forbidden his children to play with their cousins. He was far too generous a man to make his children secretive about the little luxuries he gave them. He was also far too sensible to allow himself to be forced into dispensing apples from Bombay to all the children in the neighbourhood. I never heard Swāmidās make a similar remark, and certainly he regarded beliefs about *najar* as ignorant superstitions. Nevertheless, he was expressing a real anxiety about his own affluence which was not large enough to cancel out the poverty of his children's playmates.

The sequel to the story about Surajben and her baby throws more light on the situation. Let me say something about her first. She was a tall, very fair woman, in her forties, but prematurely aged. She was, I think, rather conscious of her position as the wife of one of the most influential men in the village and a little over-concerned to stress her sensitivity in

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caste matters. I remember that she once told me how she had eaten at a railway station in a room where a Vaghari was present. The sight so upset her, she insisted, that she had been sick all the way home. The Vaghari are very low-caste herdsmen in Gujarat and the word has connotations of extreme filthiness. Surajben had five children, all boys. Her husband, Kishor, was a partner and manager of a small irrigation works owned by Swāmidās and some others who lived in a nearby village. The family had a financial security unknown to the bulk of the villagers. They ate rice every day and used wheat where the majority used millet. In short this was a family blessed in every way.

I had often spoken with Surajben about the beliefs and practices in which women were said to be the peculiar authorities. Amongst other things we had spoken of *najar* and she had explained a great deal to me. *Najar* was usually unconsciously exercised and sprang from desire. If one was contented one did not feel desire and therefore one's eyes could not hurt others. But there were some who had a kind of permanent core of envy in them amounting to a hatred, and such people could be recognized from their eyes which were unusually big and burning. If I observed Choto (8), for example, I would see what she meant. Choto had walked into the house one day when she was frying *bhajiān*, fritters; he had only glanced at the pan, but the whole batch was spoiled.

Choto was, in fact, a distant relative of her husband. They were both members of the same descent group and they were linked at the seventh inclusive generation. There is a saying in Gujarat to the effect that a distant cousin is a near relative when he is rich, but a poor brother is soon forgotten. The section of the lineage to which Choto belonged was extremely poor. Their area of the village was a crowded, dirty shanty town: Choto lived with his grandfather, his still unmarried sister, his mother, the uncle whom she had married after his father's death and the baby born of this marriage—all in a

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'house' of two rooms, both of which would have fitted twice into Surajben's kitchen/dining-room.[3]

Choto's father and uncle had divided the property in the lifetime of the former; Choto now had a fragment of unirrigated land on which he grew chillies and a few other spices. His uncle/stepfather maintained the mother and baby himself on his own share—Choto could scarcely support his grandfather, his sister and himself from his land; he relied mainly upon his employment at the irrigation works. He was paid in cash and also in kind in that he had an occasional meal at Surajben's.

Here by any human understanding was a delicate situation. However, whereas Momad accepted patronage and, except in a few asides, showed no resentment, Choto burned. Momad was a Muslim and was treated as a member of a lower, but not polluting, caste. He was used to eating Surajben's food aside from the rest of the family, and to washing up his own utensils afterwards. Choto was of the same caste as Surajben, a Patidar, and as such could eat with the family. As a kinsman he had a right to be regarded as an equal. But he was to all intents and purposes a house servant as well as an employee of the husband.

Choto's father had been a rake and had died young, it was said, from drinking illicit liquor. Choto enjoyed something of his father's reputation. At night he told outrageous stories of his love affairs to the group of us who slept down by the irrigation works. These stories, like his ghost stories, were so enjoyably rich in exaggerated detail that no one ever challenged their veracity. He did have impressive eyes, large and glowing under thick eyebrows; he was not unaware of what Surajben said of their power.

On my second visit I got to know Choto quite well. Momad had gone to teach in a primary school some miles away. My Gujarati had much improved and Choto spoke no English. He was in touch with a side of village life very different from that represented by Surajben and her immediate family, and

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I was made fully aware of their disapproval of this new friendship. With Choto I enjoyed the underworld of the village; whereas in Surajben's family I had learned how things should appear, with Choto I discovered a lot about how things are.

I employed Choto as my *sāthi*, my companion, and shortly afterwards he began to wear a black thread around his neck with a brass amulet attached. I never discovered whether this was to guard him against the envy of his new employment, or whether he spoke the truth when he said that it was because he had been ill. We spoke of *najar* one day and I mentioned the one case that I knew in some detail, that of Surajben's baby, Bhailal, and the suspicion that rested on Chiman.

Choto didn't let me finish my story. Chiman, so much older, was a friend of his. They went drinking together in the fields at night and Chiman knew how to cook the partridges that Choto occasionally killed.[4] 'That's stupid,' he said, 'why should Chiman look at Surajben's baby? His own brother's got several sons and they've none of them ever been sick. If Chiman were like that, that is where *najar* would have struck.' 'I am sorry,' I said, 'I thought you knew, and anyhow I just took it for granted that Surajben knew what she was at.' 'Surajben,' he almost spat the name out, 'she thinks of nothing but *najar*. I couldn't count the number of times she's called me out in the night to make some offering to the goddess—*mātāji* (see below, pp. 41 seq.), she's just mean that's all. Do you know I once dropped in when she was frying *bhajiān* and when she heard me coming she shoved the pan under a bed to hide it.' The implication was clear: had Choto found Surajben preparing *bhajiān* she would have been obliged to offer him some. I remembered Surajben's own account some three years earlier of what I assume was the same incident. 'It's the same with that whole damn family,' said Choto, 'their life is such, *najar* is bound to strike.'

Choto's view of things is complicated. He certainly

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believed in *najar*, but had grounds to defend Chiman his friend from the accusation. *Najar* was not then the kind of innocent weakness I had supposed. There was an implication of a moral defect, short of conscious malice. Moreover it was attracted not by mere envy but by meanness and a refusal to share good things. That was Choto's opinion and this came close to making sense of *najar* to me. *Najar* situations came into being not simply when people had enjoyable qualities or goods, but when people having these things took pride in them, and enjoyed them, in some sense, as though they had deprived others of them. Thus a good-looking man would only be likely to accuse others of *najar* if he were himself vain.

GHOSTS

I mentioned earlier Choto's horrendous ghost stories and how they were met by a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The villagers enjoy frightening themselves with ghost stories: the taste seems universal. The young also indulge in elaborate practical jokes. There's a man in Sundarana now in his sixties, a Bareia by caste, who told me how, years ago, Kishor, Surajben's husband, and some others rigged up an oil lamp and an old *dhoti* in a thorn bush near his home in such a manner that it popped up moaning every time he tried to enter the lane. He stayed out in the fields petrified and cold all night. This had happened when they were in their late teens, at a time of life when inter-caste friendships were still possible, and a certain laxity over the rules of caste was tolerated so long as it was concealed. If marriage does not naturally induce responsibility in these matters, the marital status imposes it.

The old man who told me the story, together with Choto and his audience, believed nevertheless in ghosts at an altogether more disturbing level. The old man told me once, after a night of story-telling in which he had fully participated, that Choto was a shocking liar of course, but all the

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same it was not good to tell such stories because they could bring about the very horrors that they described. There were certain parts of the village, outside the residential area, where no man in his right mind would ever walk alone. Collective representations are often contagious and affect even the outsider. I certainly could not avoid a sense of uneasy tension when I had occasion to walk in the vicinity of such places at night.

The general word for ghost is *bhut* and the word connotes a terrifying ugliness, but not necessarily malevolence. Many ghosts are feminine and may still be called *bhut*, but *bhutadi*, a diminutive form, designates a female spirit. The word *bhut* is interesting; it derives from the Sanskrit notion of existence and the continuity of being and can have this meaning still in Gujarati literature. *Bhutkal* means past time, *kal* meaning time or period, or, in grammar, the past tense. *Bhutmātra* is the totality of being; *bhutdāya*, compassion for all beings, and so on. The use of the word *bhut* to mean horrendous ghosts is a special development.

Among the *bhut* there are special kinds. There is the *zan* (from the Arabic *djin*); this is the spirit of a man versed in the evil arts *meli vidhya* (literally dirty science); there is also the *bakrākshas*—the ghost of a Brahman. But apart from the word *bhut* itself the very commonest is *chudel*. The *chudel* is the spirit of a woman. Unlike all other *bhut* her appearance is seductively beautiful. A man might meet such a woman in the fields and could only know his peril from the fact that her feet pointed backwards. In a country where the women wear the *sāri* down to their feet this deformity might well go unnoticed, but even so, the stories have it, the *chudel* is so utterly beautiful that men have been knowingly seduced and as a result of sleeping with her, reduced to impotence for the rest of their lives.

Ghosts are most usually feared when they inhabit the fields. The few who enter houses are more manageable and sometimes even benign. The phenomena reported are rather like

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those attributed to poltergeists among ourselves; they throw pots, clothes and furniture without harming human beings. There is, for example, a Muslim house in Sundarana which was infested in this way about a hundred years ago. The *bhut* began its activities by hurling down bricks from the wall. It is said that a Patidar neighbour, who was called in to witness this, observed, characteristically, that there would be a good deal more sense in the situation if the spirit were to throw down gold, whereupon, on that one occasion, a shower of gold descended. This spirit is still said to be active occasionally.

Some house ghosts go as far as to possess their victims in such a way that they destroy their own property. The only help is to buy a charm, preferably of iron. In general it is believed that iron makes any ghost burst into flames and disappear. This does not always work. There was a man in Sundarana who had a house built by the local carpenter but did not pay his bill. The carpenter died and possessed the house owner so that the man went mad and destroyed his own house. No iron charm would work and so it was concluded that the carpenter had been a secret adept in the evil art and had become a *zan*. If a possessing spirit can be persuaded to speak through its victim and express its grievance, and if this grievance can be met, then it will usually go away in peace.

Grievance is common to all these manifestations of the dead even though some are nameless and the grievance is not known. It is simply assumed that they are consumed by some unidentifiable regret. Most often, however, the regret relates to the known obligations of others which have not been fulfilled, such as the carpenter's unpaid bill. More generally the grievance may derive from unfulfilled desire. There was a field in Sundarana haunted by the *bhut* of a man who had owned an adjoining field. He had maintained, throughout his life, an acrimonious border dispute with his neighbour, which he had finally lost. The *chudel* is said to be the spirit of a

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woman who died childless; her revenge is appropriate just as her regret can never be assuaged. It is interesting that, in a society in which women are usually blamed for a sterile marriage, impotence strikes the man who copulates with this spirit. There is a kind of justice in the folklore.

It is not difficult to understand that this belief in an unfulfilled desire relates closely to the belief in *najar*. Just as I will fear the envious evil eye only if I am aware of my own greed, and vanity is only a form of greed, so will I only fear the activity of ghosts if I have a guilty conscience. Many villagers said that to be unafraid was the best protection of all, and this is what the old man was getting at when he said that ghost stories were dangerous. Fear generates the profounder guilt to which a general belief relates, just as specific guilt relates to the belief in a specific ghost. I never heard that spirits were restless because of some ritual inadequacy in the funeral ceremonies. With the exception of the *chudel* all cases related to unpaid debts, land disputes, or vows unaccomplished, that is to say, things which the living might remedy with the family or kin of the deceased.

Some ghosts only require feeding from time to time, usually by a peepul tree. This food is taken at night by someone who does not look behind him, either coming or going. Such ghosts, together with those who regularly inhabit houses and those who possess people, come close to incorporation in the permanent pantheon of the village. There was one such permanent ghost site in Sundarana where food was left regularly and a lamp given occasionally. Some spoke of the ghost there as a *mātā*, a kind of goddess about which we shall hear more later, and also as the spirit of the great-grandmother of a man in the village. We shall see that a development from ghost to goddess is not impossible. All that is needed is more trouble associated with the spot, and a greater attention consequently paid to it, for others to start venerating the place. This is not hypothetical. Elsewhere in Gujarat, particularly Saurashtra, the spirits of women who

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have committed suttee, and even those who have proved themselves otherwise to be true *sati*—chaste and virtuous models of wifely behaviour—are deified under the general term *mātā*, although their immediate descendants continue to distinguish them as *sati*.

The reader who has some knowledge of Indian beliefs might well ask at this point: 'What about reincarnation, transmigration or re-birth? If Hindus have such beliefs how can they at the same time believe in ghosts?' To this I could add that the villagers also have beliefs about heaven and hell, more particularly the latter. One afternoon a young man was sitting by me as I was resting in a darkened room. He was very kindly ridding the room of flies by snatching them out of the air as he sat. I congratulated him on his practised ease. 'It's nothing,' he said, and then with a slightly worried look, 'but I sometimes worry about all that walking, walking, walking.' It was altogether too hot to press the matter at that time; it later emerged that he was speaking of hell, a hell in which man is obliged to walk on and on for ever and alone. On the other hand the belief in re-birth according to the law of *karma* was occasionally expressed, and there was even a little ritual about it connected with funeral ceremonies. The night after a cremation the women would spread flour on the floor, cover it with a sieve and leave a lighted lamp on top of the sieve to burn all night. In the morning they said that they could discern in the flour the footprint of the creature into which the departed soul had entered. This was not a universal or in any way mandatory practice, and indeed it was dismissed by some men as a foolish superstition. A far more regular institution was the throwing out of food, curds and water, most often on the anniversary of a death. It was believed that if the crows took this food it would in some way benefit the departed soul. I never saw the crows pay any attention to these offerings nor did I ever see anyone wait to see whether they would.

The villagers of Sundarana, like the majority of peoples

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known to social anthropologists, were very vague about the after-life. I suspect that much of the information collected from different parts of the world on such matters is more often synthesized on the spot, in response to Western query, rather than the integrated theory that is sometimes presented in the works of anthropologists. When Indian peasants, or philosophers for that matter, are confronted with the ancient 'contradiction' between a belief in individual survival in hell or as a ghost on the one hand, or on the other the belief in re-birth, they can very easily sythesize the two beliefs: death is followed by a period of punishment or reward which varies in length according to merit, but ultimately the law of *karma* requires a re-birth unless the soul has been freed for ever from the operation of that law.

I do not think it very sensible to give in to a desire to solve contradictions in this way, and I find support for this view from village conversation. For the social anthropologist it is not only a question of *what* is said, but *who* says it and to *whom* and *where*. Thinking over remarks about the after-life in this way it seems clear to me that there is a rather simple formula underlying this 'contradiction' in beliefs. Re-birth is primarily for other people. Just as few Westerners accept fully the finiteness of their own existence, so that death tends to be thought of as something that happens to others, so the Gujarati peasants when they speak of themselves as individuals conceive of a hell or some sort of heaven. It is when they speak of others, when they are looking for some wider theory to explain the grief, sorrow and misfortune of others, that they have recourse to the theory of re-birth. Certainly they do not deny salvation to others, equally they apply the re-birth theory to their own occasional griefs but primarily the emphases are distributed as I have described.

There is another aspect of the matter. It seems clear in some contexts that actually these two beliefs are not at the same level. The belief in some kind of eternal salvation relates to the future whereas the belief in re-birth relates to the past.

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Some sin in a previous life 'explains' why a man is born as an untouchable, or why some woman has had the great misfortune to survive her husband, and is obliged to live out the inauspicious life of a widow.

Let me conclude with a summary note on *najar* and beliefs about ghosts. Both are clearly related to human obligations and the failure to meet them. Joyce Cary in *The Horse's Mouth,* talking of the secretive way in which tramps in a London doss-house cook their food, speaks of the 'evil eye which is the eye of envy'. Certainly, at one level, the belief in *najar* tells us something about the greed and avarice which can only be found in their purest form where people live on the bread-line, have never lived anywhere else, and do not expect anything more. It also tells of the acute value placed upon the, for us, ephemeral goods of youth, good looks and vitality in a population where the average expectation of life is only thirty years, where women are soon prematurely senile, and young men show signs of muscle wastage at twenty-five.

At the level of the sociological, *najar* tells us of status and equality. *Najar* is not to be feared between equals, such as brothers, nor between people whose status is clearly different and defined. It is most to be feared when those who should be equal are not so in fact. From this point of view natural good looks, which might be the gift of all, may be envied by any. At the social level, however, *najar* bites deepest within the caste, especially in a large caste such as the Patidar, where, in one lineage, a man may live in contentment while his kinsman spends his life near to starvation. When some do accumulate wealth, the fear of *najar* defines the ways in which wealth may be enjoyed, that is with modesty; it requires all men to be generous according to their means.

The evil eye can be turned away, and its ill effects can be cured. The belief in ghosts speaks more of irremediable ills past, and of unavoidable evil in life itself. The wilful over-looker who is the embodiment of pure unmotivated

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malice, the practitioner of the black science and the barren woman—for these there are no remedies. Among the ghosts are also those who have been cheated of their dues just as, in a sense, the barren woman is cheated. Such beliefs underlie the value of a good death which leaves neither material nor moral debt or loan behind it.

NOTES

1. The name is a corruption of Mohammad. Momad is one of a small group of Muslims in the village known as Vora. This name is a corruption of Bohora, the name of a large Shia Muslim sect. The corruption of the name is symptomatic of these village Muslims' ignorance of their faith. They circumcise their male children and visit the mosque in town once or twice a year, at which time they also eat meat. For the most part they behave as a vegetarian caste of middling status and are so regarded by the Hindus.
2. J. C. Pratt, who has done field-work in Siena, draws my attention to an over-simplification here. He points out that sickness can also be caused by excessive love, *volere troppo bene*; as he puts it, 'we have to take jealousy into account as well as envy'. This suggestion from the Italian material that jealousy, or possessiveness, can directly harm its object must be explored in future comparative studies. (J. C. Pratt, D.Phil. thesis.)
3. The re-marriage of the widow by a younger brother of the deceased is an economical custom much condemned by people of good family and pretension. Choto's family was looked down upon by those who had relinquished this custom within living memory. Choto's sister, although past the age at which village girls are usually married, still shamefacedly wears the blouse and skirt of a maiden.
4. The Patidar are in principle vegetarian, but meat-eating is not unthinkable. The fact to note is that a man might eat meat, or drink alcohol, out in the fields; he would not dream of bringing such things home to pollute the house. Similarly, a man might have sexual intercourse with an Untouchable woman, but he would not take food or water at her hands.

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3

Goddess Cults—Status and Change

In this chapter I reverse the order of what I believe to be a historical development. I describe three ceremonies performed in Patidar households on one and the same night, all ostensibly for the same purpose, but each one telling us of the standing of the various groups. I go on to generalize and to show how whole castes vary their ceremonies according to their view of their own status or their hopes for the regard of others. The line of development in both cases seems to be from a state of symbiosis between pure and impure castes to a more univocal dependence upon Brahmanic values only.

I then turn to the past to describe an older cult where this symbiotic relationship is fully acknowledged; a cult which has faded in this part of Gujarat, but which is still active further west. The breakdown of the ritual interdependence of the pure and impure castes seems to me to be of immense significance, foreshadowing as it does the breakdown of political and economic interdependence between caste and caste.

I have mentioned *mātā* several times, but what are they? The word means, on the face of it, 'honoured mother', but the word *mātā* is not used in everyday speech for mother. Indeed, when I say it *means* 'honoured mother' I am relying on a dictionary, and the Sanskrit word *mātr*, a mother. I never heard a villager develop an imagery of motherhood in connexion with this word similar to that our own clergy make

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when they try to explain why we speak of God the Father. As a matter of fact, the dictionary comes nearer to peasant usage when, as a secondary meaning for *mātā*, it gives 'smallpox'. We shall see that the actual beliefs and practices which revolve around the word make any easy translation impossible.

Sundarana, like all villages in Gujarat, has an uncountable number of shrines associated with *mātā*. Sometimes these are thorn bushes and one can only know that the *mātā* is sitting there, as the villagers put it, by the rags tied to their branches. People tear off a bit of their clothing and tie it on as a votive offering. A much more common sight is that of two simple bricks lying flat, about six inches apart, with a little clay dish between them, sheltered by a third brick transversely resting on the other two. Not quite so common, but familiar enough to any traveller, is the *deri* or *daheri*, a small domed shrine of plastered brick, not much above three feet high. There is an arched opening on one side and most often the shrine is entirely empty. Sometimes one can find a debris of little clay dishes inside and on the surrounding earth, sometimes a chaplet of coconuts has been slung round the dome and empty shells of coconuts are littered around. In a very few cases one can find crude figures of horses made of clay or rag.

The clay dishes are to contain the commonest votive offering, a lamp. Oil or *ghi*, clarified butter, is put in the dish and a small cotton wick is floated on the surface. A more substantial offering is the coconut, while the horse figures are a speciality of certain *mātā*. The horse is their *vāhan*, literally their vehicle, the creature on which they ride. All these offerings are either to placate or to thank. A woman has lost her goat and promises the *mātā* a lamp if she finds it before nightfall. Surajben has had a bad dream and wakes up one of the boys sleeping in the courtyard to send a lamp to the *mātā*—immediately.

There are still other beings referred to as *mātā* who have

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temples with images and resident priests, but such buildings, naturally enough, are not found in the villages although the *mātā* concerned may still be so. There is, for example, the famous temple of Ambājimātā on Mount Abu in Gujarat where the *mātā* sits, but she can also sit in the house of a devotee; in a shrine in a field; or, indeed, anywhere that she fancies. The pattern is one familiar to the Roman tradition in Christianity: our Lady of Lourdes, or Fatima, has one chosen spot associated with her, and is also worshipped in thousands of households.

The connexion between Ambājimātā on Mount Abu and Ambājimātā in the fields is obvious to the peasants, but there are other *mātā* in the village who also have central and famous sites about which they know nothing. Again, there are nameless *mātā*. The behaviour of the villagers to all of these is uniform and it seems best, therefore, to look at *mātā* beliefs from their point of view, at least to start with.

As I have suggested the *mātā* are part of everyday life, but they also have their special season, *navarātri,* the Nine Nights in the first, or bright, half of the month of Ashvin, the last month in the lunar calendar. The celebrations culminate on the eighth night, *mahāstmi,* the Great Eighth.[1]

On one *mahāstmi* I attended three ceremonies, and I now describe the events which occurred, together with the revealing differences between them.

The first ceremony was in Shivabhai's house and was attended by his immediate kin and a few friends, Choto and myself included. Shivabhai was a mild rather ineffectual character, a member of a very small and poor lineage in the village. The celebration in his house was of relatively recent institution. The *mātā* in whose honour we were assembling had originally been nameless, and her place had survived in one of Shivabhai's fields; who had originally set up her shrine no one could remember. Shivabhai had encouraged her, and I say this deliberately because there are many ruined and forgotten shrines which are almost totally neglected. People

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put a lamp by them during the Nine Nights just to be on the safe side, but for the rest of the year they forget about them. Shivabhai, anyhow, had built a small shrine of bricks for the nameless *mātā,* and planted trees about it. Some time after this, he said, she possessed him one night, revealed her name, Vāhanvati—and asked him to take her into his house. Shivabhai had thus become, in the last few years, the *bhuvo,* devotee-priest, of this *mātā,* and had established a minor reputation for cures.

One hears so much about Brahmans as priests in India that one is very often led to conclude that they are the only priests. In fact, the number of people having the kind of office that we would translate as 'priesthood' in a village like Sundarana is probably greater than that of Brahmans resident in the village. The priest of any godling or *mātā* can in theory be of any caste. However, they are very rarely of higher caste and, in Sundarana, I think that Shivabhai was the only *bhuvo* among the Patidar. The majority were of lower caste. Such priests might be called *pujāri,* that is someone who, like a Brahman, performs the *pujā,* worship. More commonly, however, he is called *bhuvo,* a word derived from a Sanskrit name for Shiva, *bhav.* The distinctive function of the *bhuvo* is to become possessed, at which time he trembles and speaks with the voice of the *mātā* to complain of neglect, to ask for offerings, and to make promises and predictions. I will describe a typical scene shortly. Although the *mātā* normally possesses her chief servant, her *bhuvo,* she may seize on anyone present to a greater or lesser degree by simply making them tremble, or by speaking through them. At a big ceremony it is quite common to see half a dozen men jerking up and down while the main procession is in progress.

The trembling, nodding head and the querulous speech of the *bhuvo* when possessed is a favourite subject for village mimics who may regard all *bhuvo* as bogus but continue to believe in the act of possession. Such imitations are regarded as slightly dangerous since they have been known to result

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in genuine possessions. Given the beliefs this is not surprising, for the rapid deep breathing which precedes the possession can produce a peculiar state of dissociation.

On the Eighth Night that I am talking about we were invited to eat at Shivabhai's house. He had been fasting from the first day of the Nine Nights but, apart from the fact that he did not eat with us, he played the host with normal cheerfulness. I should add that his fast, *upvās*, limited him to taking tea twice a day and to one meal of *suran*, a large, shapeless root vegetable known as Elephant's Foot.

After we had eaten and washed our hands we went up a ladder into a small room upstairs where we sat facing a small shrine constructed for the occasion out of silver and coloured paper. Above it hung four pictures depicting scenes from the life of the Lord Krishna. The shrine itself was empty. After a little while Shiva joined us carrying a broken tile on which were some burning coals. On to these coals he threw a little incense which he offered in front of the shrine where, I was told, the *mātā* was already sitting. He then turned to face his small congregation and wafted the scented smoke towards us. After this he put the tile down at the side of the shrine and called for a knife. He was given one of the small clasp knives such as are used for preparing vegetables in the kitchen. Sitting cross-legged with this in his hand, he went suddenly into a violent convulsion, clearly straining his stomach and neck muscles and breathing deep and fast. After about thirty seconds he snatched at a fresh lime and hacked it roughly into pieces which he threw about the room; in all he disposed of four limes in the course of the session. Then, an old woman, his elder brother's wife, questioned the *mātā*: '*Mā*, why isn't my baby [one of her grandchildren] getting any better?' Shivabhai shrieked, increased his convulsions and then began muttering unintelligibly to himself. Finally he said 'Bring the child.' The baby was brought and, still twitching and muttering, Shiva laid his hand on its head. He called for red string and a bundle of this was given to him.

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He tossed it into the air, played with it and finally threw it down violently in front of the old woman saying: 'Tie this.' One of the threads was teased out from the bundle and taken away, the rest was put down by the side of the shrine for retail later to other mothers in need. Shiva then went back into his convulsions, groanings and deep breathings. After a while he said, peevishly, 'Ask, ask. Why don't you ask?' One of the boys laughed and said, 'Well, go on someone, ask. I don't know how to, you've got to have the knack.' There was silence apart from Shiva's breathing but slowly questions began to come, the questioners addressing Shivabhai variously as Mahārāj, a term normally used to a Brahman, Mā, Bā and Mātāji. In between questions, or during the convulsions, we chatted quite freely amongst ourselves, as though we were sitting waiting for a train, and only fell silent at the more dramatic moments. Someone, I think it was Choto, asked about a recent theft (from myself), and two boys of lower caste, who were not present, were named by the *mātā*. Choto, who knew very well that some people had accused him of the theft, called on all to witness what the *mātā* had said. Another man asked whether his wife, who had run off to Ahmedabad, would return to him. Shiva replied that it would be an expensive matter, various offerings would have to be made. The man said 'Where?' and was told 'Here, of course.' After specifying the details Shiva extended his palm, for all the world as though he were doing a deal in the market place, and said '*Kabul*' agreed? and the questioner slapped the open palm in confirmation. '*Kabul*.'

Throughout the proceedings very little reverence was shown to the *mātā* or to her medium. The conventional tone of the *bhuvo* is that of a peevish old woman, and that of the questioners an affectionate tolerance. One question, relating to the fields, received an unsatisfactory reply. Two or three people laughed and said, 'Well, we knew that.' The *bhuvo* snapped back, 'Then what did you ask for?'

In the course of the session, which I suppose lasted a little

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over an hour, various *mātā* took over the medium, and as his behaviour changed members of the audience asked 'Who are you?' The most dramatic appearance was reserved for the end when the *bhuvo* snatched up a rusty and blunt old sword from the shrine and, pressing its edge on to his tongue with both hands, sucked vigorously at the blood which was supposed to be flowing: Kalika had come. Kalika is another name for Kāli, a ferocious and bloodthirsty goddess worshipped in many parts of India.

The whole proceeding ended abruptly. Shiva suddenly relaxed and appeared exhausted. The company got up and left, folding their hands to the shrine as they passed it saying, '*Jāy mātāji*, hail to the *mātā*.'

During the whole performance Shivabhai's actions, when looking for things, taking them up or giving them, seemed entirely controlled. The place where he was squatting was perilously close to the open trap-door leading to the room below. My comment, and my use of the word 'performance', is in harmony with the attitude of the company as we gathered in the street below. No one believed that the whole thing was a sham, equally no one seemed to feel that it was convincing in every detail. The general reaction seemed to belong to the twilight world of superstition between faith and knowledge. One man summed it up after having voiced his own doubts and said, 'Still, one never knows, there's probably something in it.' Other people in the village were more frankly sceptical and regarded Shivabhai's cult as a trick to get money. Some women, however, consulted him regularly.

From Shivabhai's house we strolled on to the next ceremony which was held in the front room of a large house in the densest area of Patidar concentration in the village. This was not a private affair such as the one we had just witnessed; it was something much more on behalf of a whole lineage, the Prabhudas Lakhujivalla. There were, however, members of other Patidar lineages present, and members of other castes. This was an annual event and something of a

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spectacle. This time the shrine itself was not on view; it was a permanent one in the inner room from which such things as the *bhuvo* called for were brought. The *bhuvo* was a man of low caste, a Patanwadia, and, although many people put questions to the *bhuvo* in the course of the evening, the leading part in the questioning was taken by a man of the Rāval caste, a caste associated with music-making, particularly on the drums.

The whole performance was more polished and, so to speak, professional than the one we had just witnessed. The *bhuvo* sat quietly chatting with the Rāval and then fell silent, as did the majority of the audience. The presence of a *mātā* became evident from the twitching of the *bhuvo*'s muscles and face; he finally moved into full possession and announced himself as Ambājimātā, upon which the audience started singing a hymn in honour of the goddess as the *bhuvo* started to twitch. Ambāji was followed by Kalika who, on this occasion, did nothing spectacular; she was followed by other *mātā*. There were no particularly vigorous convulsions nor any violence. The traditional tone was, however, maintained. The *bhuvo*, once in his trance, spoke with a high, peevish, quavering tone. As the hymn drew to its close he was heard muttering to himself sarcastically, 'Very nice, very pleasant. I know you lot, you're going to do this, you're going to do that, but you don't do anything. You leave me alone, you don't feed me. Why should I have anything to do with you?' and so on. The Rāval made it his business to cajole the *mātā* into a more pleasant frame of mind. This dialogue was engrossing and it was quite easy to forget that one was listening to two grown men. The Rāval, half solicitous, half joking, spoke exactly as though to a much loved but tiresome old grandmother. 'Come, come, don't talk like that. Look at all these people who've come to see you. Look at all these nice presents we've brought you,' and so on. As regards promises of cures and predictions for the coming year, the proceedings were much as before. At one point the *bhuvo* was asked

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about the child who was not recovering despite treatments. He replied that it was no affair of the *mātā*, nor *najar*, nor the activity of some *bhut*. The questioner quite blankly contradicted him and said that another *mātā* had, through her *bhuvo*, claimed that the sickness had resulted from the neglect of her shrine. At this challenge the Rāval called for a pot and a handful of grain and the *mātā* was asked to say, rather as in a table-tapping seance, whether an equal number of grains should signify yes or no. Then positive and negative questions were asked about the source of the child's sickness. After each question a small quantity of grain which the Rāval counted was thrown on to a cloth. In this way a diagnosis and treatment of the sickness were arrived at.

For me this session was particularly noteworthy for two reasons. First of all the *mātā*, through her *bhuvo*, kept demanding liquid opium but was given instead a hookah to smoke and occasionally water sweetened with sugar. Secondly, on one occasion she demanded, with some vehemence, a goat. This request was met with laughter mingled, as far as I could judge, with embarrassment. The Rāval said: 'Ah no, don't ask that. What do you want with a goat?' And the *bhuvo* abandoned the request immediately. These requests were interesting because the drinking of opium and the eating of meat of any sort are regarded as low-caste practices to which no Patidar would, especially in public, admit. We shall see later the significance of the request.

By the time this second session had finished it was getting on for eleven o'clock at night, and I was thinking of my bed. Choto had slipped off somewhere when one of Surajben's young cousins came up to tell me that I, and a few others, had been called to another house. The house was, I discovered, that of Hāthi, the wealthiest man in the Vallabhvalla section of the Prabhudās Lakhujivalla lineage, which regarded itself as superior to other sections. The timing of the ceremony was nevertheless tactful. This group of 'secessionists' had taken care to avoid any appearance of a deliberate clash of

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programmes and, indeed, most of them had attended the second ceremony.

The third ceremony was altogether more exclusive than either of the other two that I had attended that night. Apart from myself, only families in this one lineage section were represented. The courtyard was brightly lit with paraffin pressure lamps, and the ceremony centred on a *daheri* which had been specially whitewashed and painted for the occasion. The chief *mātā*, on this occasion, was said to be the same Kalika who had appeared twice earlier in the evening. But this time the element of possession had been eliminated entirely. There was no *bhuvo* and instead a Brahman had been called to perform *homa*, an orthodox fire service, with offerings of *ghi*, wheat and rice. After the sacrifice, a lamp of *ghi*, incense and *kanku*, a red paste, were offered on a dish to the fire while the names of famous gods, well known in Indian literature, were recited. When that was completed the dish was offered up to the shrine while the names of the famous goddesses of literature were recited, the litany concluded with, 'and all other gods'. The dish with its offerings was then placed within the shrine. Using the *kanku* the Brahman marked the walls by the shrine with a swastika and *trisul*, the sign of a trident, then all the company received at his hand a *kanku* on their brow and the proceedings came to an end. The general atmosphere on this occasion was quite different from either of the two preceding ceremonies. Whereas before the audience had sat chatting and laughing and had felt as free to make jokes about the *mātā* as about each other, here I felt myself to be in a much more 'religious' situation. There was no chatting during the ceremony, people sat formally and concentrated upon the Brahman's activities with serious faces. After the Brahman had wrapped up his utensils and gone, the host continued to sit with a solemn face and we, in turn, took leave of him in the most formal manner. It was now near midnight and *mahāstmi* had come to its close.

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All the *mātā* involved in these ceremonies have two things in common which distinguish them from other *mātā* in the village; they are house-dwelling and non-specialized, by which I mean that they are not associated with any particular activity. Several *mātā* in the village, together with one male godling, Bhattiji, are specifically associated with particular diseases of which the most feared, in the past especially, is Sitalamata, the smallpox *mātā*. The word *sital* here means 'cool' and, because the smallpox burns the skin, this is a very polite name for the goddess who is said to be hot tempered and easily insulted. Another specialist is Hadakāimātā (from *hadakavā*, hydrophobia). This *mātā* is in most villages located in the Untouchable quarter and her *bhuvo* is also an Untouchable. The dogs which infest the Untouchable quarter are usually said to be more fierce than other dogs in the village because, people believe, they eat more meat. Both of these diseases are less to be feared now than they were in the past. In Sundarana I heard little of them and would probably have heard nothing about Hadakāimātā had I not made inquiries. In the fields about a quarter of a mile away from the residential area of Sundarana there is quite a large shrine, about nine feet high, dedicated to Joganiomata. This again must have been an important place in the past. It is set in a piece of ground surrounded by a wall enclosing a ruined *dharmsālā*, a resting place for pilgrims, said to have been built many years ago by a wealthy Bania, a member of one of Gujarat's trading castes, who lost and found his purse at that spot. Today the *mātā* is looked after by an elderly *bhuvo* who is paid by Surajben's husband, Kishor. It seems that in the past some kind of ordeal was held here when a crime was suspected, but today the place is neglected, as the incumbent *bhuvo* bitterly complains.

Of all the specialists it is the male godling Bhattiji who still maintains popularity. He is the only male in the local pantheon but is found in other villages with Baliadev, the consort of the smallpox *mātā*. Bhattiji is associated with

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snakes and scorpions, and the different ways in which the association can be viewed tell us a great deal about beliefs in Gujarat.

When I first came across a Bhattiji shrine it was in the fields near a predominantly Jain Bania village. Many Bania in Gujarat are members of the Jain sect and, in orthodox families, they obey the precepts of that sect which minimize the possibilities of violence to any living creature. Here I was told that Bhattiji was the guardian of snakes and scorpions and would, as a punishment, possess anyone who killed one of these creatures, until he had made amends. In Sundarana, on the other hand, where the *bhuvo* of Bhattiji was of the Bareia caste, who have no such scruples, I was told that of course such creatures must be killed, and that Bhattiji was the protector of men. Anyone bitten by a snake must have immediate recourse to his shrine where an enormous drum is kept to summon the *bhuvo*, at any time of the night or day, to administer the cure. I shall have more to say about Bhattiji and his shrine in another connexion. Here it is sufficient to note that so long as any *mātā*, or godling, has specialist associations with any particular disease or mishap, he or she does not take up permanent abode in any house.

I said earlier that Shivabhai had 'encouraged' a *mātā* who was apparently quiescent in his fields. The way in which she entered his house was typical. When a man falls sick of general debility, or of fever which he cannot shake off, then supernatural causes are looked for while physical treatment continues. If the possibility of *najar* has been eliminated then a *bhuvo* is called. In such a case one would not call the *bhuvo* of a specialized or named *mātā*—that would be to prejudge the issue. A devotee of some nameless or (which is the same thing) multi-named *mātā* is called. He invites possession by the *mātā*, and that *mātā* who is troubling the man will, perhaps after the intervention of others, eventually speak and say why she has brought the disease.

In some cases she may simply specify a remedy in the way

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of an offering, but in others she may express the desire to come and sit in the house. A shrine is then prepared for her which may be anything from a design on the wall to a glass-fronted cupboard with pictures of Kāli or Ambāji in it. This *mātā* may then give no further trouble, so long as she receives daily attention. The householder may or may not, according to his economic condition and piety, call a *bhuvo* once a year to be possessed by the *mātā* and be fed on her behalf. There are many house *mātā* in Sundarana which remain apparently quiescent for years in this way. When the householder dies, then the son who inherits that part of the house in which the *mātā* is sitting will attend to her. If there is no trouble the attentions which the *mātā* receives become more perfunctory as time goes by; storage pots and boxes accumulate in front of the shrine and finally, in the course of making repairs, re-plastering the wall or extending a room, the *mātā* is lost to sight. Sometimes people are troubled by a *mātā* who claims that she was venerated by an ancestor and has been neglected. If the shrine is in a cupboard it stands more chance of permanence but, in such circumstances, it will very rapidly be assimilated with the picture of Kāli or Ambāji; soon this itself becomes only a background for the brass or stone images of more widely known deities of the Hindu pantheon, bought at various places of pilgrimage.

A *mātā* may, at the particular wish of a devotee, be transferred from one family to another, temporarily or permanently. The householder himself, or a *bhuvo*, becomes possessed and offers a coconut to the goddess which is afterwards placed in the hands of the applicants. If the applicant trembles, the *mātā* has inhabited the coconut and may be carried to her new place. In one instance a man disputed the ownership of a piece of land with another and paid a *bhuvo* to 'seat' his *mātā* on the disputed property, to trouble his opponent. The intention here was that the *mātā* would further his interests and hamper his rival who was in fact in possession. The rival pointed out the shrine to me with great amusement. The

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mātā can also be evicted. In Sundarana a carpenter bought a house in which Kalikamātā was found to be sitting. He belonged to the Swāmi Narāyan sect, which I have already mentioned. As a devout member of the sect he did not wish to perpetuate the cult of the *mātā*. He himself did not believe in the *mātā*, he said, but to save appearances the *mātā* was transferred to a coconut by which *pujā* was performed. The coconut was then reverently thrown into a nearby river. The iron flail with which the former *bhuvo* had lashed himself when possessed—this is a habit with some—the carpenter kept, 'It's handy to beat the wife with.'

However, in a few families, and those mostly of the Patidar caste, the cult of the *mātā* is preserved and even expanded in the second generation. The *mātā* of the second ceremony that I attended is said to have been seated there by the founder of the lineage, Prabhudās Lakhuji himself. The Patidar of that lineage liked to refer to it as a *kuldevi*, literally the lineage goddess. This term connotes prestige; in most parts of Gujarat only Brahmans and the royally connected Rajputs have such lineage goddesses. Although such claims are made by some Patidar families in some villages, the practice is by no means universal and, I suspect, is to be understood as yet another attempt to associate the family of the claimant with high status.

In his particular case the claim also served another purpose. Those who attended the third ceremony were attempting to dissociate themselves from their poorer kinsmen, and it was these latter who particularly insisted that the *mātā* of Prabhudās Lakhuji was the *mātā* of the entire lineage, including the seceding group, and therefore its *kuldevi*. The seceding group certainly and explicitly repudiated this claim. In general it was rare to find a *mātā* who had been in receipt of continuous worship in one house for many generations.

The reference in the preceding paragraph to status-seeking by imitation of practices thought to be superior is a feature of our own society as much as of caste society. What are the

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differences between us and them in this? The main difference is that this kind of imitation amongst ourselves is more the affair of an individual; in India it is a group matter. Secondly, whereas in our own society there are various ladders which a man may aspire to climb, in traditional Indian society there is only one, and that is determined by the values of caste. The behaviour of the local Brahmans constitutes largely the scale of these values, so that if, as is most often the case, the local Brahmans are vegetarian, then vegetarianism is a local caste value: people who imitate the Brahmans in this matter are that much more highly regarded than those who do not. Today, of course, with the growth of literacy and the accompanying spread of literature, notions of respectable behaviour derived from temples, monasteries and the centres of wide-spread sects, increasingly affect these local ideals. Today it is quite likely that although meat (but never beef) eating is tolerated in a certain area by higher castes, a lower caste may attach itself to the vegetarian scale.[2] In general, while all men want to be rich, powerful and the like, riches and power must be, so to speak, invested in the values of caste if they are to bring status.

But, and here is another major difference, wealth is not freely converted into status as happens, if slowly, amongst ourselves. Caste society imposes limits and what these are can be seen from the following true account.

There are two villages near Sundarana—I prefer not to name them and shall refer to them as A and B—which had been rivals for years. Both are prosperous and have connexions with government, industry, high commerce and the like. What the original dispute was no one really knows, but people say it was over a marriage and this is certainly very likely in this part of India. Whatever it may have been, there are apparent grounds for rivalry in the present. I call them villages but in the census one is classified as a town and both have substantial populations. If the government sets up a secondary school in the area it must be in one of these two.

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The other, which contributes a large proportion of the student population, must watch its children walk the two miles to school. Again, a very bitter dispute arose over the question as to which village should have the railway connexion. Whereas before, Patidar land-owners, like their British counterparts in the past, fought initially to keep the railways off valuable agricultural land, today relatively swift contact with the cities is more prized, and to be on the railway has obvious commercial advantages.

The particular squabble that I am going to describe is of the kind that can only arise when rivalry is entrenched, and almost anything can be the subject of a row. In this case it was a clock-tower! The men of A had put up a fine clock-tower, visible and audible for quite a distance in this flat countryside. The men of B were determined to have a bigger and better one. As all too often happens, disputes arose within village B about who had subscribed, who had not, how much this man should give and so on. In the midst of this stalemate one man, a native of B, now a wealthy cloth merchant in Bombay, offered to foot the entire bill. The Patidar of B were now in a quandary because this wealthy benefactor happened to be an Untouchable. The mean and arrogant solution to their predicament was this: yes, the Untouchable could be allowed to pay for the clock-tower, but he would not be allowed to have his name inscribed as donor on the foundation stone. Since most foundation stones of schools, *dharmsala*, temples and hospitals tend to have a list inscribed on them not only of the subscribers but also, often enough, the amount of money which each has given, the Untouchable withdrew his offer and left the Patidar to their problem. In short, an Untouchable, however wealthy and even respected in commercial circles he may be, cannot be allowed to invest his wealth in even so secular an object as a clock-tower and so presume to status. A few years ago at least, it was not uncommon to read in the local newspapers that the Untouchables of such and such a village had been raided and beaten

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up precisely because their material condition had improved and they had let it be seen.

At the other end of the scale a Brahman does not need to support his status with wealth or the ostentation of it. The reader might think that we also have vestigial notions of decayed aristocracy, and of the mystique still attaching to blue blood. But however strong such notions may have been in the distant past, the cadet lines of our aristocratic families have, for the lack of financial support, merged with the commons and been lost to sight. In the Indian countryside, however, a Brahman is a Brahman by birth and is respected as such even if he is working, like one I knew, as a porter on a railway station.

There is a second qualification to the imitation of superior values which seems to have been stronger in the past, when the identity of caste was more marked in distinctive dress, style of turban and the like. To the extent that the members of a superior caste felt their identity in their clothes, they do not seem to have tolerated easily any imitation of these. People in a lower caste might win a grudging respect from their superiors if they abandoned meat-eating, but if they then started to wear their *dhoti*, for example, in the manner of a superior, then the reaction was often punitively savage.

I was told the following story as an instance from the good old days when men were men, and so on. There was a young Bareia of Sundarana who had got a little money together and took it into his head to grow the big curly moustache favoured by Patidar at that time; this was sixty years ago or so. In addition he sported the red turban. That, I am told, was the Patidar prerogative in those days. He then took a stroll through a Patidar village, smoking a little portable hookah such as any Patidar gentleman might smoke. Living in this village there was a powerful Patidar about whom a variety of ferocious stories were told. It seems that this character spotted the Bareia, had him seized by his retainers, summoned the village barber and ordered him to shave the

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upstart's face and, for good measure, his head as well. He then ordered the Bareia's hands and the offending hookah to be tied behind his back, and had him beaten round the village and out into the fields.

The fact that today one can rarely tell a man's caste from his appearance indicates that this particular aspect of caste identity has crumbled. This is not insignificant, for however trivial such matters might seem to us, the story I have told is typical as regards the amount of emotional investment there was in these external signs.

Finally, probably the greatest difference of all between imitation in Indian caste society and the Western aspiration to 'better oneself' or 'climb', is the underlying of morality. In our society we live according to a univocal scale of values. This does not mean, of course, that we all necessarily share the same values, but it does mean that we scale the values that we do have positively or negatively, we aspire to the good however we conceive it and eschew the bad, however we conceive that.

The Indian situation is more complex. We have to rid ourselves of the notion that 'low' in the caste hierarchy implies moral condemnation of such a kind that members of low castes ought to abandon their evil ways and conform to a universal set of values. Members of such castes are indeed said to be *halaki*, lightweight or shoddy, *nīch*, low and *kāli*, black—but in spite of being regarded as morally inferior, they are not morally condemned. One can very often hear the phrase *e lokone pāp nathi*, 'for those people it is not a sin', used in discussion of meat-eating, widow re-marriage, liquor drinking or any custom which the speaker regards as low. For this reason my own presence in Patidar houses was tolerated. It was known well enough that Europeans glut themselves on whisky and mutton; these two and biscuits were the commonest items of European diet that I heard mentioned. But for me the consumption of these things was not a sin as it would have been for one of them.[3] This relativity of a caste

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system is well known. There was, and probably still is, in Baroda a small group of professional men who followed a particular *guru*, said to be many centuries old. It was said of him that at one time he had been *guru* to a caste of thieves and had devoted himself to making them better thieves. This is the essence of traditional caste morality; whatever it is your lot to do, do it well.

Relativity counters any tendency to wholesale imitation of the superior. A family, or a section of a whole caste, must first have changed its image of itself before it would institute such changes. We can put it another way and say that the changes are not seen as innovations but as the recognition of an ideal which has been there all the time. Thus we read about castes that have 'changed' their status, but what is subjectively recorded is not a change, rather it is regarded as a reversion to a former status, said to have been lost to sight for generations. I am convinced that in the traditional caste system people do not aspire to higher status: they do not see their own society as a mobile one as we see our class society. They simply live the good life as they see it. What happens is, that for reasons we do not entirely understand, their notions of what constitutes the good life imperceptibly change.

The third ceremony that I attended on the night of the Great Eighth, over which a Brahman presided instead of a *bhuvo*, is an example of just such a change in one section of the Prabhudas Lakhujivalla lineage. I was also present on another occasion at a larger ceremony where a whole caste was involved in much the same process. The account of this ceremony brings this process more into the light and raises further items for our understanding.

The centre of activity is the shrine of Bhattiji, in Sundarana, the largest such that I saw in any village. Before describing the ceremony let me say more about this shrine and about Bhattiji himself.

The story of Bhattiji is, in various versions, well known

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right across Gujarat. In essence it is as follows: Bhattiji was a Rajput by caste who was, like all of his caste, a devotee of the cow. While he was celebrating his wedding, and before he had completed the circumambulation of the fire which seals the contract, he received news that Muslims were attacking herdsmen and killing their cows. Bhattiji immediately left his bride by the sacrificial fire, took his sword and went to the defence of the cow. In the battle he was killed and so came to be revered as a martyr. I never heard any story which gave an account of his connexion with snakes and scorpions.

The shrine itself, *daheri*, is larger than usual, being over six feet in height and some five feet square, with the usual arched opening. On the back of the wall is the figure of a man in bas relief holding a small bow in his right hand and a short, broad dagger in his left. This is the dagger which, traditionally, the bridegroom carries on his marriage procession. Outside the shrine and to its left, set in the earth, is a large double trident—*trisul*. The central prong of the larger trident is itself made into a trident. Half way up the shaft of the *trisul* a small iron dish had been welded on to serve as a lamp. This *trisul* is the *shakti* of Bhattiji. I will return to this notion of *shakti* later.

The shrine is surrounded by a wall built recently but, for lack of money, not completed. The intention was to create a temple around the shrine, and this may yet be realized.

The major feast of Bhattiji is on the first day of the new year when a *mela*, fair (literally a concourse of people) is held. People come from surrounding villages, hawkers sell sweets, hot snacks, plastic toys and the like.

What we have here is a centre similar, though much smaller, to Ambājimātā's temple on Mount Abu. This shrine in Sundarana is locally regarded as the most powerful seat of Bhattiji. This seems to be a general pattern. Whether a god or goddess is recorded in the literary pantheon of India, or whether it is known only locally, it always seems to have a particular centre which is, so to speak, reflected in the minor

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centres, in villages and in houses throughout the territory. One may recognize such centres by the fact that on the day of the god or goddess the *mela* is held there. It seems that, in the past, these were much more comparable to the traditional European markets than they are today. I was told that formerly various village artisans would also bring their goods for sale and that, as in Europe, the fair was the great time for dealing in cattle. Today at the Bhattiji *mela*, for example, even the local artisans are not apparently concerned to take advantage of the commercial possibilities.

The central rite of the Bhattiji *mela* is the possession by Bhattiji of his *bhuvo* who, in a trance, shoots arrows representing those which Bhattiji himself fired at the Muslims. The fiction is that first, because he is normally an elderly man, he is suddenly endowed with such strength that he can shoot the bow, and secondly that, even though he shoots into the crowd, no one is ever hurt. At least when I witnessed the ritual, the bow was a light one well strung and the arrows themselves so light that they scarcely carried thirty-five yards. Secondly, the crowd opened up as soon as the arrows were set in the bow, leaving a wide avenue down which the *bhuvo* could shoot.

What is significant for this account is that Brahmans have only recently been introduced to the shrine of Bhattiji, certainly since 1940. Formerly the feeding of the god was performed by a Bareia *bhuvo* and his cook assistant. Today two offerings are made. The Bareia cooks sit outside the surrounding wall of the shrine and cook a kedgeree of mixed grains which one of them then takes in and offers to Bhattiji; thereafter the crowd fight for the remainder which is called *prasād*. This is traditional temple practice throughout India, the *prasād* is the remnant of the food which is supposed to have been eaten by the god, and the consumption of it carries considerable blessing. Today, while the Bareia cooks are performing their part, three Brahmans perform a fire sacrifice just inside the wall immediately before the archway of the

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shrine. At the side of the shrine two Brahmans offer up the coconuts and flowers which the faithful of all castes have brought. They break the coconuts and return a half to the donor as *prasād* and the other half is left within the shrine. At a little distance three or four men sit quivering as the spirit of the god possesses them. In the far corner the Rāval plays on his drum.

This whole scene represents the new aspirations of the Bareia in Sundarana, or at least those of an influential section of the caste. The attempt to convert a relatively simple shrine into a temple is itself significant. More striking is the fact that Brahmans who, in this village, have hitherto kept clear of Bhattiji worship, are now willing to officiate in front of his shrine. The traditional priest or *bhuvo* has been demoted and the food cooked by his associates, although offered to the god, is cooked away from the main shrine. The offerings of individuals are dignified and universalized by being received and returned as *prasād* by Brahmans.

What do I mean by 'universalized'? Simply this: were the offering to the god cooked by Bareia then it could not be accepted as *prasād* by a member of any caste which regarded itself as the superior of the Bareia. However much it may be the leavings of a god who is respected by the Patidar, it is still essentially food which has been cooked by a low caste from which the Patidar would not normally accept food. On this occasion I was particularly careful to see who took which *prasād*. Some Patidar in fact ate the kedgeree *prasād* cooked outside the wall by a Bareia. Other Patidar who came with coconuts for the shrine ate the Brahman-offered coconut *prasād* only. Of these, two young men were to my knowledge cautioned by their mothers not to eat the inferior *prasād* of grain. The behaviour on this occasion compares with that at another sacrifice which I attended. On this occasion the goddess was Meladimātā, the dirty goddess, to whom on occasion people offer blood sacrifice. The Patidar who had accepted the grain *prasād* of Bhattiji refused the grain

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prasād of Meladimātā. Those who did eat it said that they were obliged to abstain from sexual intercourse that night on pain of suffering severe diarrhoea. Others said that there was no salt in the kedgeree, and for this reason the food could be eaten. I must add that I have never heard this particular reason adduced on any other occasion for eating food from an inferior caste.

The ceremony at the Bhattiji shrine perfectly represents an intermediary state between traditional low-caste and traditional high-caste behaviour, and the ambivalence of the situation is reflected in the behaviour of the Patidar in relation to the *prasād*. I naturally did not ask everybody what they had eaten and what they had not eaten, but I think it is significant that, on this occasion, Choto and his friends freely ate anything that they could lay their hands on while the young men of superior family, Surajben's closer kinsmen, were more diffident. One I do remember, who said that he took a little only out of respect for Bhattiji but could not eat more. This is surely a case of the individual salving his own conscience in a painfully ambiguous situation.

The reference to Meladimātā and the blood sacrifice reminds us of the second ceremony that I described earlier at which, it will be recalled, the *bhuvo* called at one point for a goat. The reference here was to a blood sacrifice which, today, most Patidar have eschewed entirely.

When I inquired into this matter it became clear to me that just as there are pure and impure castes so, but more absolutely, there are two categories of *mātā*—the clean and the unclean. There is, for example, in Sundarana, one nameless *mātā* whose shrine is out in the fields and who, it is said, refuses to enter any house, despite the prayers of her devotees, because she fears the pollution which might occur from the presence of women and strangers. She asks for and receives only vegetarian offerings. Other *mātā* ask for, and sometimes get, offerings of buffalo calf, goat and cock, and of these the archetypical *mātā* is Meladi. I was fortunately able to collect

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the story about this goddess which I give as near to the original manner as possible.

> It is like this. Once all the gods were fighting with a *zan*, fearful and disgusting just like a member of the *Bhangi* caste, scavengers, or a *Vāghari*. They fought three long days and did not win. Indeed, they were so tired that the *zan* nearly conquered them. At night they sat down to consider the situation and one of them said 'Brothers, let's make a goddess from our faeces.' This they did. Their new goddess was so powerful that she fought the *zan* and killed him. Once she had achieved their purposes the gods ran off because they had made the goddess from filth. However, the goddess ran ahead and, by taking a short cut, out-distanced them and, by her magic, made a garden in the road along which they should pass. The gods came, saw the garden and sat down to drink from the well in the middle of it. As soon as they had drunk the water the goddess appeared to them and said 'Well, brothers, you have drunk my water and what are you going to do about that now?' They were in danger of becoming Untouchable and begged the goddess for mercy. She said 'Well, I will release you on condition that you give me a name and worship me.' After thinking about it they decided to call her Meladimātā because she was made from filth, *mel*. And that is how she has always been known.

The belief in Meladimātā, and other *mātā* of the same class, poses problems for the Western mind. Earlier writers on India tended to dismiss the continued existence of meat-eating gods in vegetarian populations, and of a non-Brahman priesthood, as survivals from a pre-Aryan age. The shortest way of dealing with this argument is to point out that something which has survived for three thousand years or more can scarcely be described as a waning fashion. More seriously, a basic premise of social anthropology is that all that goes on in society makes sense at some level or other,

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and that it will not do to dismiss, as a survival or a foreign importation, something which appears to contradict one's own expectations.

Let me give an instance, this time a hypothetical one, of a Brahman who had been bitten by a dog. If we imagine that, as a pure caste man and priest, he would have the same attitude towards Hadakaimātā and her *bhuvo* as a Christian priest might have towards the local palmist, we are much mistaken. Dog bites are the business of Hadakaimātā and her *bhuvo* is an Untouchable, that's all there is to it. If the Brahman wants protection he must have recourse to this *mātā* and he will do so as this is the obviously sensible thing to do. Dog bites are among the natural hazards of life. The situation is the same as regards the natural impurities which the Brahman and his family bring forth in the way of nature —blood, sweat and faeces; to deal with these exigencies of life the Brahman has recourse to the Barber, Washerman and Scavenger castes, with no sense of internal conflict.

Because Brahmans have only recently agreed to dignify the Bhattiji ritual by their participation, this does not mean that previously, if they were bitten by a snake or scorpion, they would not have gone to the shrine immediately to make an offering and to be cured. Thus the Patidar of Sundarana also regard all the *mātā* of their village as essential to their pantheon; they believe in them all. What kind of offering they make, whether or not they will eat the *prasād* or not, is another matter. I once asked Kishor, Surajben's husband, whether he was going to some festival in honour of a *mātā* and he said, in effect, 'Goodness no, I can't be bothered.' I said, 'Don't you believe in the *mātā*?' He looked at me as though I were mad and said, 'Of course I do, I just don't worship her, that's all.'

'Those who eat meat, offer it,' a Bareia said, trying to explain his theology to me. This is a simplification but it indicates that kind of sociological awareness that seems so common among Indian peasants. His remark indicates that

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he is looking at *mātā* worship not only from the point of view of the recipient of that worship but also from the point of view of the worshippers. It is entirely true that there are some goddesses who demand meat only and some who insist upon vegetarian offerings only, but there are others, as for example Kalika, who receive whatever it is that their worshippers choose to offer them. However, if a Brahman is obliged to have recourse to a blood-eating *mātā*, and if that *mātā* demands a blood sacrifice, then she must have it. This does not mean that the Brahman will witness the sacrifice, let alone perform it or eat the *prasād* afterwards. He pays for the goat or whatever it might be. The rest is attended to by the *bhuvo*. Marked changes have taken place in the lifetime of the living, changes which are only pointed to when I say that, often enough today, people of vegetarian caste do not wish to be associated, however remotely, with the spilling of blood and give a pumpkin instead of an animal, or the model of a goat shaped from pounded pulse.

Let us briefly return to the second ceremony of the Great Eighth held by the descendants of Prabhudas Lakhuji. The *bhuvo* asked him for opium and was given a substitute; he, or rather the *mātā* in him, called for a goat and it was denied. Here we have a group of people at variance with their goddess and it is an interesting human situation. We have the traditionally ferocious Kālimātā ensconced as the reputed family goddess of a lineage, which, ostensibly at least, and for the majority I believe in practice, is now vegetarian. They are still sufficiently traditionally minded to call in the correct *bhuvo* of Kāli, a man of low caste, a meat eater and one who would offer meat to his own *mātā*. They must either convert the *bhuvo*, or abandon him just as their kinsmen who met later that evening had already done. At the third ceremony, it will be remembered, it was again Kalika who was being honoured.

I have another instance of the conversion of a goddess on an altogether grander scale, apparently involving the entire

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Patidar caste. An account of this must start with a reference back to my earlier remark about *kuldevi* among the Patidar, and my suggestion that, when people claimed that a *mātā* who had been sitting in their house for several generations was a *kuldevi*, a lineage goddess, they were, for the sake of their own prestige, laying claim to an institution which is found among Brahmans and Rajputs (above, p. 54). It certainly seemed that in the past the desire to make this claim was stronger and, indeed, it may be that the ancient Patidar, like many low castes today, did indeed have one particular sacred place associated with a *mātā* to which they had a particular devotion. According to Brahmanic law it would be incorrect to call such a *mātā* a *kuldevi*: a *kuldevi* is one element of a whole complex, one of the components of a prestigious configuration which includes mythical ancestors, and an association with certain *veda*, which is only found in its full manifestation among Brahman and Rajput castes. We could put it more simply by saying that the *kuldevi* are the goddesses of distinct lineages within the caste, whereas the caste *mātā* is common to all lineages within the caste.

When I was first in Gujarat I made routine inquiries about the existence of *kuldevi* and caste *mātā*, and I was told that, indeed, the Patidar had a caste *mātā* which some Patidar informants referred to as a *kuldevi*. This was Ashapurimātā, a name which was translated to me as the wish-fulfilling *mātā*. I was told by a Patidar that they were obliged to go to her temple at least for the first hair-cutting ceremony of the eldest son, and that all Patidar would make a point of going to her temple at the annual *mela*.

Ashapurimātā had two main seats in Gujarat; one is near Bhuj in Kutch where she is the *kuldevi*, in the correct sense, of the Jadeja Rajputs. It is, I think, significant that the Jadeja Raputs were very influential in Gujarat in the nineteenth century; it is more than probable that the Patidar have imitated them in many particulars. The other seat of the *mātā* is at Navsāri in south Gujarat. This latter shrine does

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not appear to have any particular affiliation. Apart from these two main seats the shrine of Ashapurimātā, to which the Patidar refer when they speak of their '*kuldevi*' is a minor seat in the Kaira District.

I was determined to see this concourse of Patidar and made special arrangements, on a singularly hot day, to travel to Ashapuri. As a *mela*, the affair was not as disappointing as many *mela* often are. There was a reasonably large crowd, roundabouts, fortune-tellers and a wide variety of hawkers. However, I am reasonably confident that, apart from the few who accompanied me there, very few Patidar were present. Certainly I saw not one of those who had been most explicit in assuring me that, come what may, the Ashapurimātā *mela* was essential. The majority attendance was made up, as far as we could judge from the red head-scarves, of Bareia and the easily identifiable members of nomadic castes from Saurashtra.

I challenged some of my informants after I got home and they smoothly assured me that their remarks had referred to the past. Today, they said, it was too far to go for most people, who preferred, anyhow, to attend at Dākor or Vadtāl on holy occasions. In the expression of this preference the whole story is summed up: Dākor and Vadtāl are both centres of sectarian interest about which I shall have more to say later. Both from the spoken and the written word it seems likely enough that the Patidar were more assiduous in their attentions to Ashapurimātā in the past. Indeed, one would not have found the notion that they should attend her *mela* so widely expressed if there were not some truth in it. But today their interests have turned to other things.

The shrine itself bears witness to a considerable amount of attention in the past and indeed architecturally expresses the history of the development of this attention. The main shrine of the *mātā* is a poor affair, resembling a village shrine of the slightly better sort. It is somewhat larger than the village *daheri*, just about high enough for a man to stand upright

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inside. It was evidently old and in rather bad condition, unpainted and unrepaired on the outside. Inside, on the back wall were two figures in bas-relief, shaped like Egyptian mummies, their outlines crudely picked out in red paint. In answer to my inquiry I was told that there had originally been two sisters, Asha, the elder and the larger, and Puri. I have never heard this before and strongly suspect that it was the inventive creation of the moment.

In case that sounds arrogant, I should say that the villagers in Gujarat, at least, had a remarkable gift for etymologies. I remember Momad saying to me once that the origin of the word *dikaro*, a son, was from *dipa*, a lamp, and *karavuṅ*, to make or do. The *dikaro*, therefore, is the one who offers the lamp to, presumably, the soul of his departed parents. There are no real grounds for such a derivation, and I have never heard anybody else offer it. Nor, indeed, was Momad proposing a serious etymology, rather he was using the language of etymology to make a poetic association, a sort of pun. I find many such 'etymologies' innocently recorded in my early notebooks.

To return to the shrine of Ashapurimātā, I would speculate that the unequal size of the two figures suggests an even more ancient history: it is usual when a couple is represented for the male to be the larger and for the female to be standing on his left. It is quite possible that the Ashapuri shrine was originally constructed for some quite other cult, now completely forgotten.

The contrast between this central, crude shrine and its surroundings is marked. There is a large compound wall surrounding it and, within this, the subsidiary shrines of the elephant-headed son of Shiva—Ganesha, the god of all auspicious beginnings and doorways, and Hanumān, the monkey god, the supporter of Rāmā in his battle with Rāvana, recounted in the Rāmāyana. Hanumān is a god cultivated by wrestlers and all who wish to achieve strength of body or mind through chastity. The most striking object in the whole

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compound is a large brass griffon couchant, its head facing the shrine. Between this and the shrine itself is an oval-shaped gap in the stone floor from which some brass inset has been removed. From the position and shape one can only assume that a tortoise figure, representing Vishnu in his *kurmāvatār*, was originally set into the stonework.[4] The last substantial additions to the place were made by a wealthy Patidar of Petlad town, some time early in this century. Before the First World War he repaired the compound wall, built a *dharmsālā* and settled some land on a group of Brahmans who have, since that time, served the goddess. Since then, the Brahmans complain, they have received little in the way of substantial benefaction from anyone. The Brahmans to whom I spoke did not seem to be particularly aware of any special association between the shrine and the Patidar caste as a whole, but agreed that it was a good and holy place which people should visit, and where they could have their hair-cutting ceremonies performed.

The whole site of Ashapuri tells on the ground the same story as that of Bhattiji and the Bareia of Sundarana. Bhattiji is a god whose services are available to members of all castes, but the Bareia regard him as particularly their own. They themselves claim to be of Rajput origin and in the legend Bhattiji was a Rajput. The favourite name for him among the Bareia is Thakurji, respected lord, a title also used to address Rajputs. The Bareia have also surrounded his shrine with a wall with the intention, currently abandoned, of covering it to create a large temple. Without the resources of the wealthy Patidar they have been unable to decorate it as finely as the shrine of Ashapurimātā, but they have persuaded Brahman to officiate and, at least today, there is no hint that blood sacrifice is offered to Bhattiji.

It is very difficult for a Bareia to come up in his world. The caste is by and large poor and, where the Patidar reign, landless. There are, however, a few villages in which the Bareia are the majority landowners, and two families of Bareia in

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Sundarana, who had affinal relations with such landowning Bareia, regarded themselves as spokesmen for their caste, and were actively engaged in reformist activities directed against smoking, drinking and loose behaviour generally. Their houses, although in no way materially superior to those of others, were decidedly cleaner and more orderly. They bathed more frequently and thoroughly than others and even walked and talked with what I can only describe as a methodical reserve, quite noticeable when they were among their more loose-limbed, gesticulating and vociferous caste fellows. One of them had accompanied me to Ashapurimātā but, in common with his immediate kinsmen, his chosen place of worship was Dākor. I mention this because if attendance at Dākor, or some other sectarian centre, comes to be part of the expected behaviour of the respectable Bareia, then Bhattiji's shrine may go the same way as that of Ashapurimātā, as the Bareia like the Patidar turn to other forms of worship.

The very signs with which the shrine of Ashapurimātā is surrounded indicate the lines along which the Patidar of an earlier generation endeavoured to make their goddess respectable. Shiva and Vishnu are, it is well known, together with Brahma, worshipped throughout India in one form or another, and their worship is supported by an ancient and rich literary tradition. The figures of Ganesha and Hanumān represent the two great gods Shiva, and Vishnu as Rama; their presence outside the shrine of Ashapurimātā equates her with their cult. The location of the griffon outside the shrine equates it with a temple devoted to Shiva. In this part of Gujarat a small Shiva temple will be found in every village, and outside facing it is the representation of the bull *nandi*, his vehicle. I never saw anywhere else the vehicle, in this case a griffon, of a *mātā* so represented outside her shrine. The surviving evidence that Vishnu, in his tortoise form, had been placed between the griffon and the temple, confirms my impression that the shrine was in process of being equated

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to the superior cult. Vishnu is often represented in this form and situation outside Shiva temples although contradictory reasons for the association are given. Some who would account themselves exclusive worshippers of Shiva say that it represents the subordination of Vishnu to their God. Others, perhaps more ecumenically minded, say that the figure is introduced to remind the faithful that both Vishnu and Shiva are parts of, or manifestations of, the same undivided godhead.

These changes in the worshipping habits of individuals, families, descent groups and whole castes, are symptomatic of changes that have taken place throughout central Gujarat within living memory. Like most people who know India only through her sacred literature, I supposed when I first arrived that vegetarian and non-vegetarian cults were entirely exclusive the one of the other. I think also that I tended to impute a moralistic attitude to vegetarians as regards their non-vegetarian countrymen. I will offer evidence later to suggest that, in fact, today such exclusive and moralistic attitudes are beginning to develop; but there is no doubt that, both in the remote and recent past, the two cults were interdependent, as in some parts of Gujarat they still are.

In the mid-1960s a Brahman in Saurashtra, the western section of Gujarat, described to me the house and village foundation sacrifices in which he was a specialist. He described to me how a pit was dug at the chosen site and how a priest would sacrifice a goat or buffalo calf in such a manner that its head and blood poured into the pit. I asked if the priest were a Brahman. 'No,' he said, 'How could a Brahman do that? It is a priest of the caste for whom I am doing the work.' 'Does he do it in your presence?' I asked. 'No, I come along afterwards,' he said. 'I perform my sacrifice on top of the beast's head.' This was the kind of talk that I had never heard from a Brahman in Central Gujarat, among the Patidar, and I pressed him on the matter of blood sacrifice, asking him

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whether this was not *hinsa*, violence and therefore bad. 'Of course it's *hinsa*,' he said. 'So what? You can't have a foundation ceremony without a blood sacrifice, it's essential and that's that.'[5]

In Sundarana, back in the 1950s the villagers had successfully concealed the fact of blood sacrifice from my eyes. The practice was by that time rare, but it still occurred. Initially they denied that it occurred at all and it was a pure chance that I came across evidence of its practice. I was walking in the village with no particular purpose in mind, and noticed a handsome young black goat tethered by the side of a hut. The houseowner was sitting outside and, for the sake of making conversation I complimented him on the goat's sleek appearance. 'Ah yes,' he said, 'he's a three-day guest.' This is an idiom used of honoured guests. The generosity of even the poorest Indian peasant is astonishing but not foolish, and there are many proverbs and jokes about guests who overstay their welcome, three days being the conventional period. The goat was an honoured guest because he had been dedicated to a *mātā* and was due to be sacrificed shortly. I could scarcely ask Kishor, at that time my immediate host in the village, to keep me informed about the time of the sacrifice as he had been most strenuous in assuring me that such things did not occur. I hinted to a young Bareia that were such an event to take place I would not be uninterested in witnessing it. I said that I had seen the goat and understood that there was some possibility of a blood sacrifice. He said, rather guardedly, that he would see to it that I was kept informed, but after that I am not quite sure what happened. Placed as I was in Kishor's circle it seemed indelicate to inquire into a matter which was clearly distasteful to them, and one which, moreover, they clearly wished to conceal from me. When I pressed the young Bareia he told me that the sacrifice had been delayed because there had been a death in the family, and that now it was impossible to give a certain date in the foreseeable future. The goat vanished from its tethering peg, and all my inquiries

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were met by a smiling and apparently helpful evasiveness. A few weeks later I had to leave Sundarana for a few days and was told on my return that, most unfortunately, the auspicious time for the sacrifice had occurred while I was away.

About the past the villagers were less reticent. Kishor himself was reminiscing one evening to a crowd of us younger men about the bad old days, and he seemed to me to be thoroughly enjoying his recollections. There had just been a *mela* at the largest Shiva temple in the village, situated about half a mile away, across the railway line, the site, some said, of the original Sundarana village. I had said that it had seemed a pretty poor affair. In the course of the day scarcely two hundred people had attended and of these remarkably few were from Sundarana itself. There had been one hawker rather half-heartedly selling small plastic toys, and an enterprising Bareia family had set up a small stall to sell *bhajian*, fritters, and *sev*, a kind of dried and spiced spaghetti. A few people had made offerings of coconuts at the temple itself, but there was no special *puja*; the priests, whom I shall describe later, had deserted the temple.

Kishor spoke of the *mela* of the old days, of the hundreds of people who had come and of the market at which artisans from Sundarana and other villages sold their manufactures. It had, he said, been a great day for dealing in cattle, bullocks, buffalo and goats. 'Was there a special *puja*?' I asked. 'Oh God, yes,' he said, 'all that night there was a big do, all the *bhuvo* of the village would be there trembling away, great carryings on.' The word he used here was *tophān*, naughtiness, but the word was used with such relish that I think I am right to translate it as I have. 'What do you mean by carryings on?' I said. 'Sacrifice,' he replied. 'Goats, buffalo, calves, anything and everything, lots of them.' He chatted on about the drinking and the girls, the practical jokes and the drunken brawls, and, when he had quite finished, concluded, very properly, 'However, that was all fifty years ago. We're all civilized now.'

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The verb he used here is worth a note; *sudhāravuṅ*, to grow better, to be reformed, to improve, to be enlightened, to be civilized. The same verb is used of families or castes who, although lower than the speaker, are given a certain grudging respect because, like the Bareia families that I mentioned, they make some effort towards respectability. The use of the word in this way implies a recognition of a dynamic in caste society which is nevertheless denied by the ideology of caste.

There seems to be a hiatus in the collective thinking on this matter of which I could cite other examples. Briefly, while Kishor could give instances of what is now considered to be low-caste behaviour among Patidar of the preceding generations, he would not draw the conclusion that at that time the general estimation of the Patidar was lower than it is today. Equally, he could say, rather patronizingly, of a small group of Bareia that they were reformed, in that they were vegetarian, respectably dressed and in general measured up to his own standards of good behaviour, without for all that admitting what the cumulative effect of such changes must be.

I will give one more example of this conflict between a static and a dynamic view in this society. The Patidar of Sundarana do not rank very high in the caste overall. It is probably that they were late in shaking off the Rajput ascendancy which at least some of their wealthier caste fellows in other villages had dispensed with early in the nineteenth century. Whatever may be the historic fact, the Bareia of Sundarana claim that originally they were the landowners and that the Patidar worked in their fields. They expressed this claim by saying that they once 'sent food to the Patidar'. Now, as in the past, if a man employs field labour part of the payment will be food cooked in his own kitchen and sent out to the fields. If the members of one caste eat the food of another they are usually the inferiors and at best the equals of that caste. The Bareia are, then, claiming not

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merely a politico-economic superiority in the past but, most probably, a superior status in the caste hierarchy. Today no Patidar would wish it to be known that he had eaten food prepared in a Bareia kitchen. Nevertheless the Patidar of Sundarana admit that part of the Bareia claim which relates to land ownership. When I asked them about the food side of it they said that this was partly true, but that the food had been *pakka*, that is prepared with *ghi* or milk, not *kachcha*, prepared with water only or oil. *Pakka* foods are regarded, in certain contexts, as pure foods which can be exchanged between castes. They are certainly not as subject to pollution as food prepared in water. They are, however, expensive, certainly not everyday foods. The idea of a landlord sending out such meals to his field labourers is really absurd, but this is the only way in which my Patidar informants could reconcile the absolute of caste status with the relativities of historical change.

Evidence of a recent inter-dependence of the pure and impure, vegetarian and bloody cults, comes not only from the Patidar. I came across it also in a Bania family. Most Patidar would admit that the Bania have superior status to themselves, and, in the family with which I stayed, the standards of caste orthodoxy were very high and closely observed. I was nevertheless told that the head of the house, at this time a very old man, regarded a visit to the temple of Ambajimātā as an essential part of his annual devotions. In his youth he had witnessed blood sacrifices there and not only this, he had also received the *tilak*, mark on the brow, from the blood of the sacrificial beast and brought a blood-stained handkerchief home with him as a blessing for his family. In this case the picture is not confused by a history of caste mobility as it tends to be for the Patidar. In the past the Patidar may well have been the active participants in the inferior cult in which they now participate only passively if at all. The Bania, on the other hand, whatever other reputation they may have, are, and throughout the recorded

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history of Gujarat have always been, a byword for the observance of high-caste and vegetarian practice. Many sections of the Bania caste are also Jains who carry the avoidance of violence to living creatures to extremes. For this Bania in his youth the violent cult was as necessary a part of his world as the non-violent. The best contrast that I can think of is that of a man in our own society who might feel guilty about eating meat because he had not, as he might put it, the courage to kill the chicken or the bullock that he liked to eat. For such a mind which tends to totalize the universe and at the same time individualize the consciousness of it, the more thoroughgoing relativity of the traditional Indian world view must seem strange.

I conclude this chapter with a quotation from a popular text devoted to the cult of the *mātā*: its title may be rendered in English as *The Most Glorious History of the Goddess.*[6] This is a thick book, cheaply bound with rather garish illustrations, printed in large characters for easy reading. In similar format the great classics of Indian literature, the Purānas, the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata, become available to the villagers at a remarkably low price. These works contain not only the stories of the gods but also a great deal of moral exhortation and prescriptions for the performance of rituals. In the book from which I quote there is, as so often, a dialogue between two characters, in this case a Brahman and a king. The discussion relates to the appropriate ceremonies for the Nine Nights and I translate the king's question in full because it is typical of the style:

> The king asked: 'Oh most high Brahman, when the Nine Nights come then in what manner are the holy rites to be performed, when the autumn festival of the Nine Nights comes what specially must be done at that time, that tell me? Oh thou endowed, with the highest wisdom, most excellent Brahman, what fruits may we expect from the

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Nine Nights and what rites should we perform then, be magnanimous and amply explain.'

The Brahman then holds forth about the Nine Nights, the reason why they occur at that time of the year, the preparation and ablutions which must be performed, the way in which the tabernacles for the *mātā* are to be prepared, and so on. After listing various offerings he continues:

> Those who are flesh eaters must kill animals and among these the buffalo calf, the goat and the boar are regarded as the highest offerings. Those beasts which have been slaughtered in front of the *mātā* go to the eternal heaven, therefore, O sinless king, this result of the goddess worship frees the killers from the sin of animal murder. Throughout the sacred literature there is talk of violent and non-violent sacrifices and it is most certain that animals that have been offered to the gods rest without any question in heaven.

The Brahman then goes on to speak of the construction of sacrificial pits. The anonymous modern editor of this text has footnoted the passage that I have quoted at two points. On the subject of meat eaters offering sacrifice he comments:

> Although many Brahmans are meat eaters they should not openly make flesh offerings. This prohibition derives from the first part of the Kalikapurana. That we are to understand that this custom is directed to Kshatriya appears from that section called Sharadatilak which says [here follow two lines of Sanskrit which the editor glosses in Gujarat] Pure Brahman who follow the ordinances should make pure (*sātvik*) offerings for, when they have abandoned offerings associated with violence, these then become for other castes the highest.

The editor/translator goes on to cite from the Purana other confirmatory texts and concludes with one indicating

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that only *mātā* or goddesses can receive blood sacrifice. He asks the reason for this and quotes again a passage which he glosses as follows:

> The goddess is accounted the presiding genius of divine knowledge and as the termination of a life span is inherent to that knowledge for this reason this offering to the goddess is reckoned to be the most dear.

The second annotation relates to that part of the original quotation which absolves the slayers from guilt. The annotator comments:

> 'This passage must also be regarded as directed towards the Kshatriya and not to the Brahmans. It is possible that there might be in the Kshatriya mind some worry about this violence and this is said for their comfort. In point of fact any man of any caste can offer any god or goddess a pure offering, indeed this is the better. Anyone who kills an animal for a ritual is re-born in a violent or passionate form unless he is able to purify his intentions, this must be taken as axiomatic.'

NOTES

1. In modern India four major calendars prevail: the Hindu, the Muslim, the Zoroastrian and the Christian/western secular. In the village the western secular calendar co-ordinates the business activities and those having to do with government, education etc. Marriages, rituals, fasts and festivals are governed by the Hindu lunar calendar according to which each month is divided into a dark, inauspicious, and a bright, auspicious half. The day of the full moon, *punam*, is the holiest day of the month most suitable for temple visits.
2. For an example of this, see Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India*, London, 1960, Chapter 4.
3. Needless to say I did not eat meat in the village; that would have taxed the tolerance of this morality too far. Similarly, although according to the theory I was classified as untouchable, I was not so treated so long as I did not associate with the Untouchables.

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4. There are three kinds of divine incarnation, *amsha*, *āvesha* and *avatāra* of which the last is the only complete incarnation; the others are partial or temporary. It is believed that Vishnu becomes incarnate at moments or periods of human or cosmic crisis: the tortoise incarnation is the second of ten which are particularly venerated; in this form Vishnu supported on his back the Mandara mountain which gods and demons used as a churning pole to raise out of the ocean certain precious objects and qualities.
5. The misunderstanding between myself and the Brahman exemplifies a change in the significance of *hinsa*. For him the word preserved its neutral meaning, killing; for me the term had Vaishnavite and Gandhian connotations of evil.
6. *Shrimad Bhagavati Bhāgavat*, published by the Krishna Book Stall, Sharāf Bazaar, Bhāvnagar, price Rs. 6/-. The subsequent quotations are taken from Chapter 2, section 27.

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4

The Old Pattern—Purity with Impurity

The annotator's comments reflect an embarrassment in the face of his text very different from that of my Saurashtrian Brahman, for whom the inter-dependence of non-violence and violence, vegetarian and blood sacrifice constituted no problem. In this chapter I show how the embarrassment is shared and exemplified in modern and changing circumstances. The tendency, especially in this part of Gujarat, is towards a resolution of the 'problem' in favour of an unequivocal vegetarianism. How this develops and what its implications are, I hope to show in a later chapter. First however, I must try to reconstruct a picture of the past in the light of which both the present 'problem' and the tendencies to the future may be better understood.

I was talking to my old Bareia friend, one day, about the *mātā*. He, rather more than most people in the village, had been to several places of pilgrimage and was generally more knowledgeable about these matters than anyone else. He said in the hearing of others that all the *mātā* were one, and that one was the *shakti*, power, energy, of God. Interestingly enough the people around him laughed at this. In fact, there is good evidence to suppose that what we now see in Gujarat of the worship of *mātā* are the fragments, so to speak, of a much older pattern of worship. I hasten to add that they are not mere survivals of an older form of worship; clearly they have their place in the present-day village, people make use

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of them as beings whose existence both explains the source of disease or misfortune and provides the cure. What I do affirm is, however, that the traditional pattern which related the *mātā* to each other and linked them with Shiva has largely disappeared. The complex of belief and worship directed towards Shiva and the *mātā* jointly is known as *shaktipuja*.

Although the majority of people in Sundarana and in surrounding villages would, if asked, profess themselves to be Vaishnavites, followers of the Lord Vishnu, the commonest sacred sites in this part of Gujarat, apart from the fanes and shrines of the *mātā*, are the temples of Shiva. In Sundarana, as in almost all of the smaller villages which I visited, there was no proper temple dedicated to Vishnu in any of his forms. In Sundarana itself in fact there was one Patidar who had a particular devotion to Rama and to his consort Sita; he had given over a room in his house to their images. There every evening he performed an elaborate *puja* to which the public was invited. Apart from this there was nothing. Sundarana is quite typical in this respect: it has four Shiva temples of which only one is in the residential area of the village. The other three are within convenient walking distance.

In this part of Gujarat Shiva is known universally as Mahādev, Great God. His temples are invariably dedicated to him as lord of some moral or material good, Siddeshwar, lord of supernatural power, Jareshwar, lord of wealth. The essential object in his temple is his phallic representation, the *ling*, or *lingam*. This is a cylinder of stone rounded at the top which is set into a *yoni*, a simple circle with a rim around it opening at one point into a long grooved duct which acts as a sluice for the water and liquid offerings which are poured upon the *ling*. Above the *ling*, hanging from the dome of the temple, there is usually an unglazed earthenware pot hanging in such a way that it drips perpetually on to the *ling*. To one side of the chamber, in line with the

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duct leading from the *yoni*, is a drain hole at the base of the side wall. In drought years when the monsoon is weak, or fails, this drain hole can be plugged up and the whole chamber flooded so that the *ling* is entirely immersed in water.

Behind the *ling* and higher up the wall a niche contains a small figure of Shiva's consort, Pārvati, which is swathed to the eyes in cloth. Outside the door of the inner chamber there will usually be figures of Hanuman and Ganesha on the observer's left and right respectively.

In only one such temple did I see the bird figure of *garud*, the vehicle of Vishnu. The villagers were less perturbed by the anomaly than I was and said that they presumed that the *achārya*, the priest or teacher, who had ordered the building of the temple must have had some good reason for it. The main chamber of every Shiva temple is fronted with a small, covered forecourt open on three sides and usually accessible by steps. This forecourt is covered by a dome smaller than that surmounting the main chamber; in it there hangs a large bell which the worshipper strikes as he enters the temple. Inside this forecourt or usually outside and facing the *ling* is a stone figure of the bull *nandi*, the vehicle of Shiva. It is not uncommon to find also a representation of Vishnu in his tortoise incarnation, on the ground between the *nandi* and the *ling*.

The typical village temple is not a large affair. It is about twenty feet long and seldom more than twelve feet wide. It invariably faces to the east.[11]

Sundarana's most important Mahādev temple is the one at which the disappointing *mela* occurred (above, p. 74). The main temple is associated with two smaller temples of more recent construction and all three are surrounded by a stone wall with a ruined cloister intended to serve as a *dharamsālā* for pilgrims. The wall and cloister are said to have been built by a wealthy Bania of the village of Rās (some five miles away). The tradition is that in the past the Bania of that

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village used to bring their sons here to have their first hair-cuts. From what is left of the *dharamsālā* wall it looks as though, in the past, it may also have served some defensive purpose, for the walls are thick and parapets run along the top. The major temple is known as Jareshwar. The *ling* is believed to have been discovered hundreds of years ago by a Rabari, a member of the nomadic herdsmen caste which travels across central Gujarat once a year in search of pasture. It seems that he used to tie his cattle to a certain tree at night and discovered when he came to milk them in the morning that they were dry. He resolved to keep watch one night to see who was stealing his milk and saw the cows discharging their milk voluntarily into the ground on a certain spot under the tree. He dug there and discovered the *ling*. On this account villagers sometimes represent the name as *jhādeshwar*, the lord of the tree.

The smaller and more recent temples owe their existence to the presence near this temple for many years of a band of Gosain sadhus. The Gosain are a somewhat mysterious people particularly associated with the worship of Shiva. Some of them are married, some, at least temporarily, take to the nominally celibate life of the sadhu and wander from temple to temple or, as at Sundarana, settle to make a permanent *āshram*. A truly holy sadhu is not said to die as other men die, rather he goes into his final trance, his *mahāsamādhi*, and is buried sitting cross-legged at the bottom of a shaft facing to the north. The shaft is sealed with a small square structure surmounted usually by a squat four-faceted dome. This structure itself comes to be known as the *samādhi* of so and so. There are several such *samādhi* by the Mahādev temples at Sundarana and over one of them a *daheri* has been erected. This is said to be the *samādhi* of some famous leader of the group and his footprints are represented in marble on the floor of the shrine.

In other villages in Gujarat I have seen Mahādev temples at which Gosain ascetics still perform a daily worship. When

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I first visited Sundarana there was a Gosian couple with their children living up at the Jareshwar Mahādev compound. They had no permanent habitation there and had fixed up a simple shelter against the walls of the ruined *dharmsālā*. I assume that had there been sufficient offerings, or had they perhaps found a wealthy patron in Sundarana, they would have settled as others have done in other villages; but after a few months they packed up and went without any leave-taking.

The Gosain are particularly associated with Shiva and claim to be his peculiar priests. They are not Brahmans but their claim is admitted by Brahmans. While they were in residence at Jareshwar they adopted the Mahādev temples, kept them clean and made small offerings at morning and night. Villagers, who would otherwise walk boldly into the inner chamber to lay flowers or pour water on the *ling*, gave their offerings to the Gosain to take them in, as though his presence did indeed dignify the offering a little. Some families cling to an old practice of not lighting the house lamp until the evening offering, signalled by the bell, had been made at Jareshwar. When no regular offering was made after the Gosain had left, no one seemed much put out however. For a brief period, when the monsoon seemed unduly delayed, a group of about six old men made a regular practice of going up to Jareshwar in the evening to sing a *bhajan*, hymn, and light a lamp for Mahādev, but once the monsoon had broken the cult was not sustained.

There is another caste in this part of Gujarat associated with Shiva, Mahādev, and that is the Tapodhan Brahmans. Although they are regarded as inferior by other Brahman their right to worship Mahādev is admitted by all. A peculiarity which these two castes share, in addition, is that both are permitted by custom to eat the *sivnirmālya*, the offerings (literally, the abandoned flowers) of Shiva. This is the one god whose offerings are not normally consumed by the faithful as *prasād*. The word *sivnirmālya* in fact is

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now a byword for any worthless, expendable thing. It is not for nothing that on the very few occasions that a sacrifice is offered at Jareshwar Mahādev in Sundarana today, it is a sacrifice of the pumpkin which is explicitly substituted for an animal. If Kishor's reminiscences of what had gone on in his youth are correct, then we have more than a hint here that part of the offering was flesh which, in that context, was the perquisite of the attendant priest. Perhaps this is one reason for the degraded position of the priests of Shiva. But here I anticipate a later argument.

Nowadays, Sundarana with its priestless, cultless Mahādev temples is typical of villages throughout this part of Gujarat. The temples are convenient landmarks for arranging meetings. Because they are usually surrounded by trees they are cool places to walk to in the evening for a chat and a smoke. Sometimes people may show evidence of a minor devotion in that, before they sit down, they will first slip off their sandals and go into the shrine. bow to the *ling* with folded hands and say 'Jay Mahādev', glory and power to Mahādev, but they rarely leave an offering. I saw no man in Sundarana who regularly wore the three horizontal yellow stripes on his brow that mark the devotee of Shiva. Certainly, the villagers were not much given to wearing such marks in general, but such as did wore some mark signifying dedication to Vishnu.

Shiva's night, Shivrātri, which falls on Kāli Chaudas, the Black Fourteenth, is also the eve of the Feast of Lights, Divāli, and tends to be lost in the hectic preparations for the latter festival, which ushers in the new lunar year.

I have described a decaying, if not totally decayed, cult. The remnants, the temples, the *mātā*, the odd beliefs survive, each one integrated with the day-to-day life of the villagers in Sundarana. It is nevertheless necessary to try to understand what this cult amounted to in its heyday. Social anthropologists are much averse, and quite rightly, to reconstructing the past from fragments, but I shall, never-

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theless, make the attempt because we are not talking simply about changes in beliefs, as though beliefs could exist in some kind of vacuum. Older beliefs about Shiva and the *mātā* have changed as beliefs about caste and human relations have also changed. I shall discuss later the direction in which modern changes are turning, but we shall be able to appreciate them the better if we have a rather more precise notion of the state of affairs which existed before the time that I am describing.

Shakti means essentially capacity to do, power; in a theological context this is the power of the divine. Throughout India this power is symbolized as feminine. Beyond this point we cannot generalize because a host of different theologies and cults centre upon the divine femininity, with a variety of emphases. We could make a very general tripartite division in India accordingly as people regard Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti respectively as the supreme being. Such a distinction is not very satisfactory and has less validity even than the distinction between Catholic and Protestant in our own civilization. Not only does worship of any one include worship of the other two, but also there is no real uniformity or continuity between the different cults as they have emerged historically, or are found today in any one area. *Shaktipuja* in Gujarat is not the same thing as *shaktipuja* in Bengal, for instance; there, one has the impression, the Divine Mother is worshipped by some as the fullest manifestation of divinity superior to male gods.

In order to understand *shaktipuja* in Gujarat we have to understand also a distinction in Indian thought which corresponds to our own distinction in theology between the transcendent and the immanent forms of the divine. The divine can be regarded as *saguna* or *nirguna*, having attributes or not having attributes. As *saguna* the divine has a person and can be thought of as male or female, as *nirguna* the divine is simply 'It' or 'That'. Just as amongst ourselves the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent

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god is not exclusive, but rather complementary in that both are 'true' and the verification of one does not demand the falsification of the other, so the Indian Divine is at once *saguna* and *nirguna*. The distinction gives us an opening into Gujarat *shaktipuja*, for the word *shakti* refers to the immanent, manifest and acknowledged energy or power of the divine in the world. Because it is in the world it participates in the *māya*, play illusion, of the world, and is therefore characterized as inferior together with the world of forms and appearances in which it is manifest; for this reason it is characterized in Indian thought as feminine. In relation to this *shakti*, Shiva is the transcendent Lord, superior and masculine. Clearly he is also *saguna*, manifest in his *ling* in temple after temple, his legend and rites are prescribed in the Shivpurana, but by the same token he is also *nirguna* as the supreme being, transcendent, unknowable, unqualified and formless.

In the Indian pantheon there is no god whose co-present masculinity and femininity is more explicit in his manifest form than Shiva. The *ling* rests invariably in the vulvic *yoni* It may be wondered whether the villagers are aware of this sexual aspect, and the answer seems to be that some are and some are not. A friend of mine in Baroda, an anthropologist, told me that his aunt was quite shocked when he made her understand what the *ling* was. On the other hand some village women, of somewhat lower social pretension than Surajben certainly, were capable of making jokes based on a greedy appreciation of the phallic symbolism. Whatever doubts there may be on this score I can certainly affirm that today in Sundarana even a rudimentary knowledge of the theology that I have sketched out is almost entirely lacking, as witness the derision which met the old pilgrim's pronouncement that the *mātā* was the *shakti*, power, of God. It will be remembered that the double trident stuck in the ground outside Bhattiji's shrine was referred to by some as Bhattiji's *shakti*, although no one could say why (above, p. 60).

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When I was describing Jareshwar Mahādev at Sundarana, I said that it had, as most such temples do, a niche in the back wall for a little image of his consort, Pārvati. Apart from the recognition of the connexion the villagers address no special cult to Pārvati; there is no other *daheri* dedicated to her, and she is not referred to as Pārvatimātā with the other *mātā* of the village. Nevertheless, Pārvati is the essential link between Mahādev and the *mātā*.

In Gujarat literature, Pārvati has two aspects, each represented by various forms. In her peaceful aspect she is Gauri, Himavati, Jagan and Bhavāni; in her fierce forms she is Durga, Kāli, Shyāma, Chandi and Bheirāvi. It is in her fierce form that she can be placated with blood sacrifice. There are many other names and some, like Durga in Bengal, and Kāli (as Kālikā) and Ambaḷimātā, or Ambika, have autonomous cults centred on them with their own myths and legends. This only develops a capacity of the entire complex to contain fragmentation and individualization of its elements. Every *mātā* has some legend behind her which accounts for her name, her habits and, sometimes, for her particular manifestations at one spot rather than at another. At the same time every *mātā* can be equated with any other, all can be reduced to one, and that one in turn merged into the ineffable.

The same pattern underlies the representation of Shiva, Mahādev. For the Shivaite, the Lord Shiva is the ultimate source of being, of whom all other gods are only the appearances. No villager would be so stupid as to make separate identifications for Shiva in Sundarana and, shall we say, Shiva in the nearby village of Gorel. Nevertheless each Shiva *ling* is qualified, as I said earlier, by a particular name and the reason for the location of it on that particular spot is accounted for by a particular history. The *mātā* in each village may be peculiar to that village or they may be duplicated elsewhere, but all can be equated with the Pārvati of Shiva in that village who is, with

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Shiva himself, local and particular as well as unlocalized and general.

As Shiva is to his *shakti* so the *adisakti*, original *shakti* or Pārvati, is to the *mātā*.

All this should not be so strange to the European reader who knows something of Catholic Christianity in practice. Modern fieldwork in Spain and in Italy enables us to see how the Virgin Mary is one and, at the same time, many in her local manifestations, and how the local manifestation becomes, on occasion, for the peasants an identification. Thus we hear that the Virgin of this village is more powerful than the Virgin of another village. The Virgin as Queen of the Saints is associated with a host of saints, some of which are found elsewhere while others are of purely local derivation, some indeed have not even been elevated to the altars of the Church.

I give this parallel only to assist understanding because, despite a superficial resemblance, these two structures are very different in their significance, just as the social organizations to which we relate them are obviously different. The most striking difference in content is of course the co-presence of the pure and the impure, the peaceable and violent forms of *shakti*, which reflect the co-presence in traditional caste society of pure and impure castes, interdependent upon one another to run life in the traditional Indian way.

A lot has been written about a process which M. N. Srinivas many years ago called *sanskritization*, an unhappy term, which he used to describe the way in which inferior castes imitate superior castes. In his early work he rather gave the impression that this was an unqualified process. He spoke as though there were somewhere, in some established canon of Sanskrit literature, a defined source of beliefs which, by various media and through the attempts of castes to 'better themselves', gently filtered their way down to the masses. Such a process could only have for its end result the

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homogenization of the entire population in matters of belief, which is palpably not the case.[2]

What we have just seen is that so long as the caste system maintained its traditional structure of belief, there had always to be a distinction between high and low, pure and impure. One *mātā* might be pure for this caste and impure for that; a custom or practice that is today the mark of a high caste can tomorrow become the distinctive trait of a low caste; but always the elements, from whatever source they may derive, are subordinate to the pattern in which the structure of caste arranges them.

I should say something finally about the notion of a 'true source' which implies an accepted canon or centre of orthodoxy. The comparison between Western and Indian society brings out similarities as well as important differences. The reader has only to think of the English language which, despite considerable homogenization, exists in various dialects. He will perhaps be initially disposed to say, 'Yes, but these are different dialects of correct English.' But his notion of correct English derives from a centre which he and those around him have selected for reasons which do not inhere in the nature of language. Is the centre of correct English the same for the inhabitant of Edinburgh as it is for the inhabitant of Ohio? As Collingwood, discussing Vico, says of Italian, 'language is what the people who use it think it is'.[3]

But obviously the Western world does have its centres of orthodoxy. We might even say that the Western world loves the notion of the one true version and this is particularly so of its sacred texts. But what is the Bible but the product of a series of decisions made at different times by different bishops and communions about the validity of different texts? With a growing tendency to centralization the selective process has come to a halt, but today the Catholic version still contains books which are omitted from the Protestant version, and we have yet to see what will come of

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the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. More generally Christianity itself can only be said to exist in the millions of individuals in which it is in any way manifest, who profess and call themselves Christians. What they share is not a common body of beliefs and practices so much as a notion that there *is* one true communion, sect or Church which is usually the one of the individual speaking.

The Indian tradition is less preoccupied with centrality and a desire for the exclusive and the essential. The great texts which lay down social laws, expound philosophies and moralities, prescribe rituals and worship, as texts existed in their multiplicity. Their unity was nominal. Just as every local ling is *the* ling of Shiva, so the Mahābhārata existed in the multiplicity of its versions, each of which related the great names to particular local beliefs and legends, and set the scene in local, familiar surroundings.

The body of Indian Sanskrit scholars, in this matter inspired by Western ideals, collates and compares; the idea that there should be a one true text is rapidly receiving an embodiment in the creation of one. But this received version must inevitably dispense with, as corrupt, the localizations in which the Mahābhārata historically had its existence. The effect would be rather as though some synod in the New Delhi were to decide on the qualification, pedigree and precise duties of a Brahman, and permit henceforth only licensed and trained Brahmans to practise. Historically all that Brahmans have in common is a belief in the idea of Brahmanhood and of its superiority; to be a Brahman is to be among the purest castes in any area. But how that superiority and purity manifest themselves and are realized in any particular Brahman or group of Brahmans depends upon the particular circumstances of the time.

I have laboured this point together with a brief account of the *shaktipuja* complex which now lies in ruins, because the changes at work in the villages can only be appreciated for their revolutionary qualities if we have some

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understanding of the nature of the all-pervading relativism of the traditional Indian universe. The modern direction is towards the authoritarian, unambiguous centre in matters of belief, and we must suppose that those beliefs which more directly govern the ordering of caste relationships must alter conformably.

NOTES

1. In fact nothing is 'invariable' in this country. Sundarana provided me with my unique experience of a *ling* not so orientated. It was in a wall-shrine in the Brahman street and faced north. The Parvati figure was obviously in receipt of regular worship and the *ling* appeared to be neglected. The Brahmans could explain neither the orientation of the *ling* nor its neglect.
2. M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Clarendon Press, 1952, *passim*; *Caste in India and other essays*, Bombay, 1962, Chap. 2; *Social Change in Modern India*, California, 1966, Chaps. 1 & 2.
3. The passage continues, 'For the historian, the human point of view is final.' It is no less so for the anthropologist. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Clarendon Press, 1946.

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5

A Vaishnavite Sect—the way of grace

The ritual symbiosis, which is fading fast in Sundarana, has vanished in larger, wealthier villages where the more educated Patidar go so far, sometimes, as to dismiss the worship of, and even the belief in, *mātā* as an evil superstition. More secular interdependencies are breaking down as well. Kishor shaves daily with a safety razor, and has no need for the village Barber who continues to make his morning rounds of other houses. Surajben washes her own clothes and sends them once a month to the laundry in Petlad, where they can be properly bleached. The mills in Petlad employ more men than they did in the past, and the Patidar landlords have, perhaps for the first time ever, to compete for field labour, especially at sowing time and harvest. It is a sign of the times that the Untouchables, mostly of the Roman persuasion, thrive with their own co-operative society, and send their sons to the Jesuit college at Anand.

The buttresses of hierarchy collapse and Western technology obliterates both traditional services and goods. Each caste would survive in an increasing moral isolation were it not for the surrounding ambience of sects, which seem to come into their own in these circumstances.

Membership of a sect, adherence to a particular *guru* are not commonly incompatible with caste duties. Indeed, few sects have opposed caste regulations and survived. Sectarian teaching is adapted to man-in-the-world. Its profoundest

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inspiration may be the call to renunciation of the world, but this is tempered to the obligations surrounding the householder, who may admire this ideal while still supporting his wife and children. There are differences of emphasis accordingly as the sect is highly organized and explicit in its teaching, or amorphous, being the almost haphazard accumulation of disciples and admirers round one *guru*. In the former case there is a tendency (as I shall show) for the authority of caste rules to become contingent upon the permission or sanctioning authority of the sect. In the latter case the *guru*'s teaching very often simply enforces the basic values of caste and his more transcendental teaching provides, as it were, a resting place at the side of the main road of caste where men walk.

I seem to note in highly organized sects a reduction of caste regulations such that, although still practised, they are endorsed by the theology of the sect. This is one way of looking at the situation. Equally we must recognize two developments: first, the authority of the sect strengthens these regulations when secular influences would otherwise weaken them, and secondly, if these secular influences do succeed, sect remains as almost the sole repository of caste values.

Here is a real irony. The sect, the individual *guru*, comes from and points towards the caste-transcending world. The message of renunciation is transmitted to the laity, provided that it accommodates the language and values of caste. In its turn the sect becomes the sole guardian of that language as the world of caste begins to fall apart.

The historical development sketched in the preceding paragraph sets in motion, I shall argue, a dialectic *within* the sect and between it and the modern, Western-influenced world.

This irony finds a parallel in the very foundation of the sect, for these movements succeed and survive precisely to the extent that they frustrate the initial ambitions of their

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founders. A man renounces the world and becomes a *sannyāsi* dedicated to the lonely pursuit of his spiritual truth. Such a man would, were he successful, remove himself more and more from the world of men and finally be lost to human sight. How does it come about, then, that sometimes he becomes the revered, often deified, head and founder of what we call a sect, with its own scriptures, rituals and temples?

Traditionally in India man's life is divided into four stages of development. First that of the unmarried student, *brahmachārya*. Students of Gandhi's life and writings will recognize this term as one which Gandhi used to apply to his own practice of strict chastity. The second stage is that of the married householder, *grahasthya*. This word still survives in very polite speech to mean 'gentleman'. The third stage is the least specific and is called *vānaprastha*. At this time of life a man should be thinking of withdrawing himself from worldly affairs prior to the final stage of *sannyāsa* when, ideally, he leaves house and kin and withdraws in pursuit of a purely spiritual goal.

Obviously the number of people who can ever have followed through this complete programme must have been limited. The majority of the population, in the past as now, must devote itself to getting a subsistence from early childhood to the cremation pyre. It is striking, nevertheless, that in the houses of the relatively affluent peasantry, the idea of some spiritual withdrawal in the last years of life is strong. Old men properly devote themselves to pilgrimage and meditation, even if they do not totally abandon the general oversight of their land or business.

Sannyāsa has come, through the centuries, to be a very different thing from the stage described in the old texts. It can be chosen by a man at any age and is achieved by initiation, *diksha*, from a preceptor who has himself been initiated. In this is implied a continuity of a philosophical tradition and to this extent we can recognize schools of *sannyāsi*. Some *sannyāsi* live in monasteries subject to

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particular rules, others are more individualistic in their pursuit, and travel widely throughout India.[1]

It is only realistic to recognize that this institution which evokes awe and respect from so many is sometimes abused and exploited. My own first sight of these 'holy men' corresponded perfectly to the average Westerner's expectations. Three such visited Sundarana, their long hair piled high on their heads, their loins girt with saffron-coloured cloth, their sturdy well-fed bodies marked with the insignia of Shiva. They wore heavy rosaries round their necks and carried strangely twisted staves. They were received, initially, with a cautious respect but, within forty-eight hours they were beaten up and chased out of the village. What they had done I could not clearly elicit, but it had something to do with women. Much later, in Dwāraka, the famous temple town on the west coast of Gujurat, I encountered a more sophisticated version. This was a young man who had dropped out of some university and operated with the smooth plausibility of any urban con-man. The local Brahmans, more experienced in this kind of thing, warned me before I had paid excessively. It was this young man who told me of the 'holy market' in Jāmnagar town where, on a certain day, the supposed *sannyāsi* met to swap and sell gifts received from the faithful.

While recognizing that all this can happen, two qualifying observations must be made. First of all, in a country where poverty is still so prevalent, who can blame those who, having no alternative but beggary, practise it in its most profitable garb? Secondly, my experience does not lead me to support a belief, common in some urban circles, that all *sannyāsi* are rogues. No one who has experienced that quality of serenity and power, which is felt almost as a physical emanation from the true *sannyāsi*, could suppose that this tradition is finally decadent.

Let me return to those ascetics who, paradoxically, originate sects. As I have indicated, their relative success in the

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spiritual pilgrimage can attract others who come for guidance and initiation. In the biographies of saints one can read of such temporary groups, which break up when the preceptor himself feels it necessary to go on alone, or when his disciples feel they are ready, as individuals, to go. But it can happen that the group becomes permanent and, whether it settles in a forest or in a monastery, it then develops a fixed discipline, and the leadership is perpetuated by rules of spiritual succession.

This settling down, this institutionalization, however edifying its products, is strictly speaking a corruption of the world-rejecting *sannyāsic* ideal. The laity assist in this corruption precisely to the extent that it is at the same time edifying. Monasteries can accumulate large endowments from the benefactions of the faithful, and lay congregations accumulate around the *guru* and his immediate following. This is the result of what, in India, is sometimes called '*guru* worship', the desire for spiritual guidance from some one enlightened soul.

In Gujarat today there are many households which revere some wandering *sannyāsi* as their family *guru* and preserve, perhaps, some souvenir of him, an eating dish, a sandal or even a footprint in red paint printed on paper, among their household gods. The holy man visits their town from time to time, conducts hymn singing and delivers sermons. When finally he dies his memory may be preserved but he does not necessarily leave any sect or order behind him. Some, however, leave amongst their disciples a desire to perpetuate their teachings and practice in some permanent form. Where there are wealthy patrons a piece of land may be set aside, a temple and accommodation for the brotherhood built, books of the *guru*'s sayings together with exegeses of these sayings are published, rituals are elaborated, and for a few decades, or for centuries, the faithful come to regard the particular veneration of this *guru*'s memory as their personal *marga* or way.

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In Indian thought, there is no discontinuity, such as there is in the West, between the individual *ātma*, soul, of the individual man and the ultimate *ātma* which governs and sustains the universe; it is therefore easy for the peasantry, following in the steps of the great man's earliest disciples, to equate him with, elevate him to, the status of godhead. The followers of Vallabhachārya today commonly refer to him as Mahā Prabhuji, revered great god (see below, p. 108).

Clearly, membership of a sect can mean different things according to the particular way in which the essential fact, the relationship with the *guru*, is mediated. The most diffuse form is indicated by such terms as Vaishnavism and Shivaism which imply theologies and philosophies centring respectively, but not necessarily exclusively, on Vishnu and Shiva. A man may well call himself a Vaishnavite because his family traditionally visits the god in his house. Such a man can scarcely be said to have a *guru* other than the head of his favourite temple, whom he may revere in the most general sense.

Somewhat less diffuse is the situation in which the head of a temple, or some holy man attached to it, attracts congregations of pilgrims on holy days and instructs them in the simplified theology of one of the great Vaishnavite philosophers (see below, p. 109). Regular members of this congregation count themselves as having received *diksha*, or initiation from this particular *guru* and wear a particular kind of necklace, *kanthi*, made of *tulsi*, *occimum sanctum*, Holy Basil. The term *diksha* can mean initiation in this loose sense although properly it means the awakening of spiritual potential by, usually, the imparting of a sacred and secret phrase, *mantra*.

Altogether more formal, and corresponding much more to what sectarian membership connotes in English, is the acceptance of a precise way of life, particular devotional reading, and the authority, even in secular matters, of the head, or his representative, of a particular body having its

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own temples, rituals and the like, and a sect mark which its members paint on the brow. Such membership still differs from the membership of a Church or Nonconformist 'sect' in that, despite common rituals, liturgy and rules, there is still considerable emphasis upon submission to one particular guide within the body of the movement, who is accepted as the individual layman's *guru*.

In the pages that follow I shall be giving examples of the origin and history of particular sects and the organization of their membership. Towards the end I shall argue, from one particular example, that it is precisely the extent to which the central importance of this *guru* relationship is lost, or minimized, by an over-emphasis upon solidarity, organization and uniformity, that the sect appears to lose its hold upon the population of the modern Indian city. It seems most significant to me, and I hope to succeed in conveying this, that '*guru* worship', that is the selection by individuals of holy preceptors, often living at a great distance, is said to be on the increase in city populations.

Before I discuss particular sects I must revert to Sundarana to examine the word *bhakti*, usually translated as devotion, which is, together with the *guru*, an essential ingredient of sectarian life and philosophy.

The word devotion adequately translates *bhakti* but, particularly in popular usage and in certain schools of thought, *bhakti* carries also associations of enthusiasm, fervour and love which the English word has perhaps lost. Let me quote a few verses from the *Bhakti Sutras* of Devarsi Narada: 'Bhakti is supreme love directed towards God; it is nectar and this nectar brings self-realization through total satisfaction . . . The realization of *bhakti* in the form of the Supreme Love, makes man mad, silent and lost in the delight of the *ātma*.' The Srimad Bhāgavata, a *purāna* of wide acceptance among Vaishnavites, describes as follows the behaviour of the *bhakta*, devotee: '[he] loses all sense of decorum . . . and, like one possessed, he now bursts into peals

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of laughter, now weeps, now cries, now sings aloud and now begins to dance in a singular way.'[2]

This is a use of imagery familiar to the student of Christian and other mysticisms, which speak of the soul as being mad or intoxicated with love. Obviously one rarely sees people in such a condition. At the same time it is worth noting that in temple rituals and hymn-singing in India there are more smiles, and altogether a greater sense of people enjoying themselves, than are found in Western churches.

Strangely enough I first heard the word *bhakti* in circumstances corresponding more closely to the poetic description than I was ever to see again.

It was shortly after I had settled at Sundarana. Early one morning I was standing on the steps of the bungalow which looked on to the lane running up to the village, and noticed an old man ambling along chatting animatedly to himself. As he came closer it was apparent that he was speaking to God, Bhagvān, the very commonest word for the deity in this area. He had a small bunch of flowers in his hand which he scattered as he walked, and he was trying, at the same time, to pick the odd flower out of the thorn hedge by his side. In this attempt he pricked himself and held his finger up saying 'O, Bhagvān, look what you have done to me, for you I would throw myself into the thorn hedge.' He did not throw himself into the thorn hedge and gently made his way back to the village. I turned to Momad and asked what all that had been about. 'It's *bhakti*,' he said, 'he is showing his love for the Lord Krishna.' Momad also went on to explain that the man did no work, only came home to drink tea, and was generally a great source of worry and nuisance to his family.

The doctrine of *bhakti*, the belief in the all-saving power of devotion, is widespread throughout India. The European can find its most famous exposition in the Bhagavadagita. This text is, naturally enough, available in Gujarati

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for a rupee or two, and the complicated teaching is sometimes read out in the evenings for the edification of the villagers. Even in the Gujarati the language is of a highly elevated nature and tends to prefer the Sanskrit derived and scholarly term to the more simple language of the village. It is questionable whether the fine distinction between, for example, the manifest and the unmanifest are seized in all their complexity. Again, the villagers' understanding seems to be selective in that, for example, the stress which this text lays upon the renunciation of the fruits of action tends to be lost to sight. Certainly the lowest common denominator of the beliefs about *bhakti* in Sundarana combines emotion with a lack of ethical or social restraint. Two famous verses are often cited:

> Even a man of the vilest conduct who worships me with a single mind must be reckoned holy, for he has decided rightly. (IX verse 30)
> Those who seek my protection, whether they are sinners, women, Vaishya or Shudra, will all achieve the highest heaven. (IX verse 32)

I have been assured that these are to be taken at their face value; for a more moralistic view the reader should see Radakrishnan's translation and gloss of these verses.[3] It is perhaps worth noting that in the second verse Radakrishnan gives 'lowly born' for *papayonayah*; the Sanskrit term suggests 'born of sin' and hence 'sinful', as the Gujarati translations frankly render it.

The wandering devotee of the kind that I have described is of course rare. The most common manifestation of *bhakti* in the village is found in the *bhajan mandali*, hymn-singing groups. In theory, as the doctrine of *bhakti* suggests, there are no caste distinctions to the membership of these groups and, indeed, none are exclusive in theory. In fact those Untouchables in the village who have not succumbed to the Christian mission have their own group.

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In Sundarana there were two such *bhajan mandali*. The first was predominantly Patidar, but it also included some Bareia and members of artisan castes. It also included the muslim Momad, interestingly enough, although some of his relatives, vague though they were about the implications of Islam, were somewhat uneasy about his attendance. The second group was predominantly Patanwadia, but had members from all other castes excluding, of course, the Untouchables and, I think, the Patidar.

Of the two groups the second one appeared to be the more cohesive and regularly active. The instruments had been purchased entirely by communal subscription. In the Patidar group the essential instruments were for the most part privately owned; quarrels occasionally broke out if the owner of an important instrument was not disposed to sit up all night but would not lend his instrument to someone else.

The Patidar group owned a large stock of cymbals and other percussion instruments, including the hollow brass rods which are clashed together by the participants in the folk dance, *ras*, which has now become only an occasional feature of village life. This dance, which is believed to be the one danced by Krishna with his shepherd girls, is still danced with vigour and grace in Saurashtra and Kutch, but the performances which I witnessed in Central Gujarat were tame affairs, more resembling well-disciplined sound and movement exercises than an exciting and potentially erotic dance.

The purpose of the *bhajan mandali* is, as the name indicates, to sing hymns, and sessions are usually held in the winter when there is less work to do in the fields. Like most musical performances in India, it takes several hours for the performers, here the entire congregation, to get into the spirit of the thing, and the sessions usually last all night. The *bhajan* are devotional and moral in content. The ideal that they hold up is of the soul lovesick and lonely waiting only for a sight of the divine lover. Traditionally they praise the

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practice of *bhakti* as superior to rituals in the pursuit of salvation, point sometimes to the folly of the external signs and formalities of the priesthood, and even occasionally criticize the distinctions which society has made between men.

The tradition of *bhajan* writing still goes on today and cheap editions of modern *bhajan* set to popular film tunes are commonly available in most bazaars. The *bhajan* of two great fifteeenth-century devotees are also still sung. Narsinha Mehta and Mirabai, who composed these *bhajan*, are also remembered as examples of the devout life. Of Narsinha there is a story to the effect that, following the precepts of the Gita, he shared his devotional practices with Untouchables. As a result he was outcasted by his fellow Nāgar Brahmans, a Brahman caste still very highly regarded and, until quite recently, very influential in Gujarat. As he was outcasted Narsinha was not allowed to join in communal feasts, and the story goes that as they sat down to dine the Lord Krishna made it seem to them that beside each Brahman an Untouchable was sitting.

Mirabai is famous throughout India for her contribution to this kind of literature. She is said to have been a Rajput princess and many dramatic tales are told about her. In her *bhajan* she figures herself variously as the slave, wife and even mother of the Lord Krishna. The following translation of part of a *bhajan* written by a famous devotee Dayaram (1767–1852) brings out strongly the erotic imagery.

> Do come over to my house, Prince darling,
> Do come over to my house. Come, come there to drink
> And make me drink
> The cup of love; Then shall ride the steed of your youth.
> At nightfall come, my darling dear, for none shall find out then.[4]

When the *bhajan mandali* is meeting and is in full swing, it is clear that the participants are thoroughly emotionally

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involved in their performance. It is not uncommon for those who may not be singing to interject praises of the sentiments being expressed. However, we should no more expect that the singers are paying attention to the theology of the *bhajan* than we expect the average English churchgoer to be concerned with the theology, more or less clearly expressed, in the hymns which he too enjoys singing. Like most people involved in choral singing the participants enjoy the sense of community and the sound of their music more than either meaning or imagery. There is nothing more ludicrous about a group of grizzled and burly Patidar farmers singing of themselves as lovesick shepherdesses than there is about a Welsh male voice choir singing 'O love that will not let me go'. I never heard anybody suggest that the ritual and caste-transcending message of the *bhajan* should be put into practice.

The Patidar and the men of Sundarana in general are not great temple-goers, especially during their active lives. It is considered quite proper, however, for an elderly man to indulge in devotions which might call for amused criticism were he still young. Such a man might go to offer flowers to *Mahādev* once or twice a day, read devotional books and carry a rosary with him. Such men would be almost bound to be members of respectable, that is to say wealthy, families because otherwise they could not afford the leisure. If their circumstances make them respectable then they may well be addressed by others as *bhagat*, devotee. However, I should point out that the term *bagbhagat*, pseudo-*bhagat* or hypocrite, is not uncommonly used in the village.

Although the average villager may not be very active in devotional matters, small-scale pilgrimages are another matter. The day of the full moon, *punam*, is regarded as the holiest day of any lunar month and the most appropriate time for visiting a temple. This is the only regular excuse for an outing and, for many, it is the only opportunity that they have of seeing a little of the outside world. There are,

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of course, important shrines in other villages, but in this part of Gujarat there is no more famous temple than the Temple of Dakor, and the local railway authority puts on special trains for pilgrims at the full moon. The temple at Dakor derives its sanctity from the presence of an image of the Lord Krishna, under the name Ranchodji, which, it is believed, came from the temple, famous throughout India, of Dwāraka on the coast of Saurashtra. It is believed that the temple at Dwāraka was built by the Lord Krishna himself.

The story of the image of Ranchodji is interesting because it provides an example of the way in which the spiritual properties of one place can be appropriated by another; Dakor is in many ways in rivalry with Dwāraka as a centre of pilgrimage. It is said that Bodāno, a great devotee to the Lord Krishna, once lived in what was then the village of Dakor. He was so devoted to the Lord that he allowed a *tulsi* plant, sacred to Krishna, to grow in the palm of his hand, and made it a practice to walk the two or three hundred miles to the temple at Dwāraka once a year. When he grew too old to travel in this way he was bitterly upset, but the Lord Krishna appeared to him in a dream assuring him that if he would make the journey once more he, Krishna, would return with him to Dakor. Bodāno set out on the journey and, with the assistance of his Lord, was able to steal the image and bring it home with him. The story is well known throughout Gujarat and there are different places between Dwāraka and Dakor marking the resting places of the image.

The loss did not long pass unnoticed and the temple of Brahmans finally tracked the image to Dakor. By this time Bodāno had died and his widow was guarding it. The Lord Krishna appeared to her and told her not to be afraid, but to go out to the temple Brahmans and ask them which they would prefer, the image itself or its weight in gold. The greedy Brahmans preferred the gold and a balance was brought. The image was placed in one pan and the widow, advised by Krishna, threw into the other a

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small gold ear-ring which immediately outweighed the image. The Brahmans retired outwitted back to Dwāraka, where, rather to my surprise, their descendants still tell the tale today.

Vaishnavism provides the idiom for what seems to be a special area of Gujarati social life, a section in which universalist values can be expressed through the *bhajan*, and individualistic values asserted through *bhakti*. Instead of obliging us to see, as *shaktipuja* does, purity and impurity, Brahman and Untouchable, linked by a symbiosis which makes this life meaningful, this language speaks of an equality brought about by each individual's dedication to a single lord.

Once again we are not dealing with a real contradiction in social life, however contradictory the two doctrines may appear to us. In part the problem relates back to the discussion about ghosts and rebirth: it is perfectly possible for an individual to believe that his devotion to the Lord will bring him release from re-birth, heaven or whatever after-life he conceives, and still believe simultaneously in re-birth for others.

I asked Kishor to explain the law of *karma* to me and he explained it very much as it appears in the popular texts: a man is re-born in a condition which fits his actions in this present existence. At the same time a man is obliged to act according to the law of his temperament and could not, therefore, avoid sin if his nature was sinful. I tried to get him to speak of free will which seemed to me to be the essence of the *bhakti* doctrine. Kishor, quite rightly I now think, shut me up with: 'These are all the affairs of Bhagvān. One does what one can.' The situation was as absurd as that of an agnostic quizzing the average church-goer in this country on such mysteries as the relation of God's infinite mercy to His infinite justice, and the 'problem of evil' in the light of God's omniscience and omnipotence.

Before I give my understanding of the significance of

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Vaishnavism I should say something of its emergence in this part of India. The word Vaishnavism does not mean solely the worship of Vishnu because this has always been there, associated with the earliest Shivaite temples. By Vaishnavism I mean that cult which puts Vishnu firmly at the centre, and by Vaishnavism in Gujarat I mean the Vaishnavism that chooses Krishna as the divine embodiment.

Two immensely influential characters were born within a few years of each other towards the end of the fifteenth century. The first of these was later known as Vallabhachārya, *achārya* being the honorific title suffixed to the name of philosopher teachers. He was born somewhere in what is now called Madhya Pradesh while his parents were fleeing from a rumoured Muslim invasion of Banares where the family had originated. The second was Chaitanya Deva who was born in Bengal. Vallabhachārya in the west and Chaitanya in the east initiated Vaishnavite movements that still characterize these areas. Both have been deified by subsequent tradition, and it is impossible now to sort out the facts of their early lives and intentions. Two facts of some importance are, however, certain. Neither of these teachers appears to have had any intention of founding a church or sect. They seem rather to have been wandering scholars who attracted a following around them. Indeed, as far as Chaitanya is concerned the word scholar is possibly not appropriate; he is traditionally regarded as more of a devotee than a thinker. However, the traditions of both movements credit Chaitanya's chief disciple Nityananda and Vallabhachārya's son Vitthaleshwara with the subsequent organization and theological development of the two movements. It is also important to note that the lifetimes of these two men and the succeeding decades fell in a period of increasing upheaval, particularly in northern India, as the Mogul empire established itself.[5]

India had suffered Muslim invasion from the eighth century onwards. Still today Mahmud of Ghazni, or Mahmud

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Begadda, the eleventh-century iconoclast, is remembered in Gujarat for his destruction of the famous temple of Somnath, dedicated to Shiva, on the Saurashtrian coast. From the ninth century onwards the indigenous institutions and beliefs of India were subjected to the first impact of a monotheist absolutism. Vallabhachārya and Chaitanya are only two in a series of famous men, some devotees, some teachers, who sprang up from the eleventh century onwards. Among these are Rāmanujachāraya who preached in south India the unity of the divine in the form of Vishnu; his successor Rāmananda who carried his faith to the north; Kabir, disciple of a devotional mysticism; the famous Nanak, a little older than Chaitanya and Vallabhachārya, who in the fifteenth century initiated the movement known today as Sikhism.

The distinctive tradition of Vaishnavite philosophy is associated with the thought of four influential Vaishnava *achārya*: Rāmanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva, and Vishnu Swāmi. The followers of Vallabhachārya tend to substitute his name for that of Vishnu Swāmi as the fourth of the great teachers, and in fact he appears to have derived much of his doctrine from the Swāmi's philosophy. Despite considerable differences between them, what these teachers have in common is a reaction to the dominating teaching of Shankachārya, the philosopher credited with re-establishing in the eighth century pure Brahmanic orthodoxy over against Buddhism.

What Shankara actually taught and how he is popularly represented are two different things. Just as most people in the West have a few tag ideas which they associate with Plato, Aquinas, or Marx, so Shivaism and monism characterize Shankarachārya. It is indeed probable that Shivaism provided him with his theological idiom, and certain that his successors today associate themselves in worship with Shiva rather than with Vishnu; his philosophy goes far beyond such identifications. The simplest expression of monism is this:

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> There exists one spirit alone, and the feelings of individuality and other attributes of the animal spirit and the variety of the inanimate world, owe their origin to a principle of illusion, and are consequently unreal.[6]

Although modern followers of Shankachārya maintain that he included *bhakti* in his system, which he may well have done, it can perhaps be seen that this doctrine of monism, of *advaita*, unity, undividedness, is incompatible with the idea of devotion, in that both the feelings of the devotee and the object of his devotion are illusory, *maya*. Out of the teaching of the Vaishnav *achārya* there grew immensely complicated theories, all claiming support from the Upanishads, which gave some kind of autonomy to the individual souls. Because all these teachers never questioned the ultimate priority and unity of Brahma, their theories are not to be called anti-monist but rather modified monisms. Vallabhachārya called his own philosophy Shudhadvaita, pure monism, or monism correctly understood.

I quote some verses from one of the few works attributed to Vallabhachārya, the *Tattwarthadipanibandha*:

> 15. In this Kali Yuga [dark age] God having incarnated himself as Buddha, the gods who minister to the latter incarnate themselves in the form of Brahmans who delude the people by spreading various kinds of errors and thus prevent them from worshipping Krishna.
> 27. By the mere desire which was expressed by the words 'May I be many' souls arose as so many parts of Brahman.
> 29. From the joy-form of God came out the in-dwelling spirits which have in them the three attributes of God, being (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*) and joy (*ananda*). The *jiva* (individual souls) are without joy, and matter is without joy and consciousness.
> 30. Therefore the *jiva* are without joy. Matter, *jiva*, and in-dwelling souls are thus different in nature though they are all made of one god.

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36. By the manifestation of the part of joy in himself, the soul attains Brahman-bhava (divinity) and fellowship with God. These can be attained only by the worship of Hari (Krishna).

42. The love with a full knowledge of the glory of God, which is, besides, well established and surpasses all other kinds of love, is called *bhakti*. This alone gives salvation, and nothing else.

87. If the universe be accepted as illusory, salvation becomes an unreality like the elephant seen in a dream. The creation of the universe by *maya* . . . is contrary to the teaching of the Vedas and the Brahma Sutras.

89. The illusory character of the universe taught by the Puranas is only for the purpose of wakening the sense of detachment from the world. To say, therefore, that the universe is the result of *avidya*, ignorance, is to mislead one.[7]

The great Sanskritist, Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, comments as follows:

The whole world has Brahman for its material cause. The perception of forms apparently different from the Brahman is due to ignorance or delusion and to the true nature of Brahman being rendered imperceptible. The individual soul is identical with Brahman, a part of Brahman and atomic. From the *aksara* (which is the ultimate Brahma) composed of existence, intelligence and joy (*saccidananda*) particles come out as sparks from fire. From the predominance of the *sat* (existence) portion in them the joy portion is concealed, and thus we have the individual souls possessing *sat*, existence, and *cit*, intelligence. The individual soul is not a form of the Supreme Soul altered by a third thing being involved in it, such as the Maya (illusive power), but is itself the same substance as the Supreme Soul with one attribute rendered imperceptible. The relation between the two is thus that of identity

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(*advaita*), both being in the pristine unchanged form, i.e. identity of untransformed souls (suddhadvaita).[8]

I have quoted from Vallabhachārya and Bhandarkar at some length in order to give a sample of the kinds of distinction made in traditional Indian theology and philosophy. The thought being expressed by these two writers is relatively simple as compared with some expositions.

One element in Vallabhachārya's teaching needs to be added. The sect is called the Pushti Marga, the Way of Grace, and Vallabhachārya laid particular stress upon the *pushti*, grace of Krishna, in bringing the soul, according to its abilities, to a closer and closer devotion.

Vallabhachārya departed from the world in 1532. Some traditions maintain that before his death he went through the formal rites of renunciation and became a *sannyāsi*. Others vehemently deny this and insist that, in death as in life, Vallabhachārya had no use for austerity and renunciation. H. H. Wilson records the tradition of his end as follows:

> Vallabha is supposed to have closed his career in a miracle: he had finally settled at Jethan Ber, at Banaras, near which a Math (monastery) still subsists, but at length, having accomplished his mission, he is said to have entered the Ganges at Hanuman Ghat, when, stooping into the water, he disappeared: a brilliant flame arose from the spot, and, in the presence of a host of spectators, he ascended to Heaven and was lost in the firmament.[9]

Vallabhachārya's successor was his younger son variously known as Vitthaleshwara, Vitthalnatha, or Goswami, cow protector. He appears to have enjoyed considerable royal patronage during his lifetime, including that of the emperor Akbar. When he died he left an image of the Lord Krishna to each of his seven sons from whom the Maharajas of today are descended. The eldest son received the image which, it was believed, had been presented to Vallabhachārya by the

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Lord Himself, and the *haveli* in which this image is established, at Nāthadwāra in Rajasthan, is the most sacred place of the entire sect.

The particular teachings of Vallabhachārya need not concern us, but subsequent writers have tended to equate him with Luther on two scores: first it is said that he pinned up on a temple door in Banares the grounds of his argument against the prevailing philosophy of Shankarachya; and secondly because of his emphasis, already alluded to, upon enjoyment of the things of the world. For Vallabhachārya it seems, as for Luther, man could only exalt the glory of God by appreciating to the full his own sinfulness. Vallabhachārya's teaching was more fully expounded and enriched by his grandson, Vitthaldās, who also was responsible for designing the elaborate domestic ritual of the sect.

Officially the sect has no temples, although to the outsider it appears to have many which are both rich and complex. What seem to be temples are, according to the sectarians, the private mansions, *haveli*, of the Maharajahs in which they live with the image, *murti*, of the Lord Krishna. The daily ritual in which the god is bathed, dressed, fed, entertained and finally put to bed are thought of as part of the domestic life of the Maharaja which the faithful are allowed to witness.

Although the sect appears to have passed its luxurious heyday in the nineteenth century it is still very large and influential. The present Maharajas and their followers are quite excessively sensitive to the reported delinquencies of their grandfathers; for this reason some are reticent about the doctrines and practices of the sect. I am, understandably, very grateful therefore to the present incumbent of the Kankroli *haveli*, Shri Vrajbhushanlalji Maharaj who, to my mind, embodies the spirit of the Pushti Marga.

He is a tall, well-built man in his mid-fifties, very fair and fresh complexioned. He is a scholar who, unlike some of his brethren, has published in Hindi extensive works on the

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Kankroli *haveli*, and the teachings of his ancestor. In addition to many audiences, he also allowed me to sit as often and as long as I liked at the foot of the *murti*, and to watch the ritual. What stands out most clearly in my memory of him is the very jollity, I can think of no better word, which he brought to these acts. Whatever he was doing, whether feeding the god, giving him a toy, or, the most solemn moment of the day, offering him the evening incense, *ārati*, the almost irresistible illusion was that here a father was performing services for a loved son whose every need and movement was a source of delight to him.

In one formal audience, I asked him why the adolescent form of the Lord Krishna had been selected for worship by the sect, and his reply was characteristic: 'Well, you know, supposing that we were to worship the Lord [Krishna] in his mature form as king, how should we dare to lay down the rules for him? We couldn't say to him "Now you're going to eat this and now you're going to wear that", and we certainly couldn't pack him off to bed at six o'clock in the evening.' This remark produced a wave of laughter among the people sitting around us, and on me a sense of what Christianity had lost by its simple-minded interpretation of image worship, and subsequent condemnation of it. Christianity has no conception of *maya*, the play/illusion of the apparent world. The Western mind pursues the ineffable to trap it in words. Each successive conceptualization becomes exactly that proximate, *maya*, with which, exactly, it cannot settle down and live.

The teaching of the Pushti Marga, to the effect that nothing in life was bad, or rather that all could be made good by being offered to Krishna, was clearly an appealing one. The *haveli* in the various parts of western India became immensely wealthy as gifts poured in to the Maharaja and to the image.

It is not possible even to estimate the membership of the sect at its height at the end of the nineteenth century. One

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of the main seats of the sect was in Surat in south Gujarat; in addition there were minor seats in Baroda and at Dwāraka on the west coast. The island of Bet off the coast from Dwāraka was a famous centre devoted by the sectarians to the enactment of the life of Krishna as king. Temples were erected to his wives, whose priests, dressed as women, took their turns in performing the *seva puja,* service-worship, of the god. There are old men alive today who remember the glories of Bet Dwāraka, as it is known, but now the temples are largely deserted, and the mansions of the Bhātia merchant-princes have their shutters permanently closed.

More important than the number of those who wore the *kanthi,* necklace, of the Maharajas is the influence of the sect in shaping the temple worship of Vaishnavites throughout Gujarat. Even at Dwāraka, one of the main seats of Shankachārya's spiritual successors, the elaborate ritual performed daily throughout the day in the temple is conducted along the lines laid down by one of Vallabhachārya's descendants, even though the temple priests themselves do not admit the authority of the Maharajas. At Dakor also the temple worship derives from the same inspiration.

The key word in this kind of worship is *seva,* service. The idea is that the image is an embodiment, *svarupa,* true form, of the Lord Krishna. The priest is a servant in the house of this Lord and performs the daily services which such a king, or royal prince, requires.

The Lord's day is divided into eight parts when appropriate *seva* is made. It is only at these times that the laity may have a sight, *darshan,* of their Lord. The word *darshan* connotes more than a mere perception; it is a benediction to the seer. It is considered beneficial not only to have *darshan* of images but also of holy and great men, and this is a rather disconcerting belief for the Westerner. It is not uncommon for one to be ushered into the presence of some *guru,* visiting *sannyāsi,* or other respected teacher, and then just to sit for ten to fifteen minutes in a silence which may only be broken

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by the great man himself asking a few questions, usually through someone else, about one's origins and interests.

The first main *seva* of the day is called *mangala* and takes place early in the morning when the god is awakened. The second, *sringāra*, shows the image fully dressed. The third, called *gvāla*, represents the image as prepared to go out to graze the cattle. The fourth, one of the major occasions for *darshan*, is known as *rājabhoga*, when large dishes of specially prepared foods are presented to the image and subsequently distributed as *prasād*. After this meal the image is believed to take a siesta and the fifth occasion for *darshan* is called *utthapana* when he is awakened. This is followed by another meal called simply *bhoga*. The seventh *darshan*, *sandhya*, represents the Lord as returning from the pasture. This is followed by the last *darshan*, *shayana*, when the image goes to sleep. This last *darshan* of the day is another major occasion for the laity; at this time *ārati*, incense, is offered to the image before it retires.

Apart from what the faithful see when the temple doors are open, the image is the object of priestly activity almost throughout the day. Food of some kind is offered at every *darshan* and this must be prepared in special kitchens. The bathing and the dressing of the image also take place when the temple doors are closed. Rather as in the Catholic church, but with very much more variety, colours, foods, clothes and jewellery of the image vary according to the season.

The treasuries of some images are astonishing. Through the years the faithful have not only presented utensils of silver and gold but also jewelled tiaras, necklets, bracelets and anklets. Quite often a wealthy devotee will pay for the *rājbhoga* offering to the god and, to do himself credit, this will be an offering of the most expensive dishes that Indian cuisine can provide. A further source of income is the offering made by the devotee when he receives the *prasād*.

I intend to give elsewhere a fuller account of *seva puja*, but I hope to have said enough to convey something of the

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spirit and the sight of this form of worship. It is, as it is intended to be, at once homely and royal. The philosophy behind it is undemanding and requires simple mental dedication to a physical object and the giving of gifts. More than any other sect in Gujarat, the Pushti Marga provided an arena in which the wealthy merchant classes could display their wealth and earn at once distinction and merit. It is not surprising that the Bhātia of Kutch, who appear to have sprung from relatively humble origins as coastal traders and fishermen, were happy to devote themselves *tan, man, dhan*, mind, body and property, to the worship of the Maharajas. Sir Richard Burton witnessed the reaction of the Bhātia in Zanzibar to a Maharaja who visited them in the 1850s. He records that in return for their oblations the Maharaja pardoned them for their sin in dealing in cattle hides, and it seems certain that, for the Bhātia at least, the Pushti Marga was also the way of social status.[10]

It would be wrong to say that the Pushti Marga is on the decline today, but it has certainly to face a strong rival in the form of the Satsang, the Society of the True, which was founded by Swāmi Narāyan in the nineteenth century. The Satsang was formed, if not in opposition to the Pushti Marga, at least as a corrective to some aspects of it. It seems clear that, perhaps especially in the nineteenth century, certain abuses crept into the practices of the latter sect.

One can often find references in the literature of the 'notorious Maharaj libel case' which, authors assume, was so notorious that no further details are required. The suggestion is of such licentiousness and unnameable abominations that I think it is worth setting down the simple facts of the matter. It seems a great pity that still today members of the Pushti Marga are over-sensitive about events which occurred over a century ago, and are still contaminated in memory by the reactions of the then middle classes in Gujarat, who participated with their British rulers 'in one of their periodical fits of morality'.

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At about the mid-point of the nineteenth century some of the Maharajas of the Pushti Marga were in dispute with local Brahmans in Bombay about the perquisites of a certain temple. This dispute spread to other matters, and since the Maharajas were already unpopular with the reformist middle classes, the cause of the Bombay Brahmans was taken up by the local press and a campaign was launched against the sect and its leaders.

A leading reformer was Karshandas Mulji, a Gujarati Bania, editor of the newspaper *Satya Prakash*, the Light of Truth, founded in 1855 for the general purpose of furthering religious and social reforms, and for the particular purpose of attacking the Maharajas.[11]

The *Satya Prakash* was only one of several vernacular newspapers dedicated to similar general ends.[12] For the Maharajas the particular sting lay in the fact that Karshandas Mulji was, at least nominally, one of their own following. On 21 October 1860 he wrote and published an article accusing the Maharajas of 'shamelessness, subtlety, immodesty, rascality and deceit'; more particularly he accused them of adultery with the wives and daughters of their devotees.

The challenge was taken up by Jadunāthji Brijratanji, Maharaja of Surat, in south Gujarat. After public discussions and much delay he finally filed an action for libel against both the editor and the printer at the *Satya Prakash* on 14 May 1861. The Maharaja did not get off to a good start: once the defendants' pleas had been entered, he, or others on his behalf, set out to suborn witnesses. The sect was largely dependent upon the support of one caste in particular, the Bhātia caste, which, centred in Kutch, had grown immensely wealthy through the East African trade. The elders of this caste in Bombay sent out an order to the effect that no member of the caste should give evidence against the Maharaja; anyone so doing would be excommunicated. As soon as this fact was known the Bhātia elders were liable for a charge of conspiracy and the opportunity was seized by

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Karshandas Mulji. At what came to be known as the Bhātia Conspiracy Case, the defendants were found guilty and fined a thousand rupees apiece.

The Maharaj Libel Case came up in January 1862 and lasted for forty days. Some thirty witnesses were called by each side, and among those for the defendants was the Reverend Dr. John Wilson, F.R.S., Honorary President of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. The discussion ranged over many matters of theology: were the Maharajas truly divine or not; was the sect in accordance with Vedic principles etc.; primarily it centred on the alleged immorality of the sect's doctrines and the particular immorality of the Maharajas.

Unlike many sects which had and have an essential ascetic inspiration, the sect of the Maharajas was designed more for life in the world, and placed great emphasis upon enjoying the things of the world. The worship of the sect centred upon Krishna in the form of a young boy, a lover adored by the Gopi, the shepherdesses. In evidence Dr. Wilson said that from his personal study of the doctrines of the sect, he believed them to be of an impure character. He admitted both that he had never been inside one of the temples, or personally observed 'improper practices' by the Maharajas; but he went on to say: 'I have seen very obscene conduct on the part of the followers of the Maharajas, and have turned away from it with disgust.' The nature of the immorality imputed to the Maharajas varied from pressing the toes of female devotees to having intercourse with them. It was alleged that members of the Bhātia sect in particular felt that they should offer their newly-wed brides to the Maharaja before enjoying them themselves. Dr. Wilson made a significant connexion between the worshippers of this sect and the worshippers of the 'female energies' as he called them, the Shaktis.[13] At the end of the case the judges were not entirely agreed on some points of law, but the final outcome was certainly a moral victory for Karsandas Mulji,

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who was also awarded costs. Sir Matthew Sausse concluded his judgement as follows: 'After having found a verdict for the defendants upon the issues raised by the plea of justification, the plaintiff can only recover a verdict for nominal damages on the plea of not guilty. As we have felt obliged to disbelieve the plaintiff on his oath and also a greater number of the witnesses produced to corroborate him, our verdict will be entered without costs.' These nominal damages were assessed at five rupees which, the Maharajas' party announced after the trial, was a gesture of compassion on the part of the court for the poverty of the defendant.

The English press in India was united in deploring the legal technicality which had prevented a total victory for Mulji. It went on to wag the finger of reproof, for example, the *Bombay Gazette*, 22 April 1862:

> If the natives have any respect for the opinions of their European acquaintances and friends, the knowledge on their part that the latter are now aware of the disgusting and abominable things that are done of them in secret, must have a salutary effect upon them. We call upon them to renounce these hidden works of darkness etc.

The *Bombay Saturday Review* spoke of 'loathsome lewdness' and inevitably, 'debasing bondage'. Many papers predicted great advantages for Christianity out of the trial, while the *Indian Banner*—'Oh! it shocks our feelings to speak more particularly of the impurities coming from the filthy flesh'—promised its readers that when a work on the *History of Civilization in India* came to be written, the account of the trial would constitute its 'raciest' chapter![14]

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NOTES

1. For a general survey of *sādhu* see G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, Bombay, 1953. This reference calls to mind the memory of Dr. L. N. Chapekar whose sensitive assiduity as a field-worker enriched this, as many, of Ghurye's works.
2. *The Philosophy of Love—Bhakti-Sutras of Devarsi Narada*, edited by Hanuman Prasad Poddar. sixth edition, Gorakhpur, 1957, verses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, pp. 25–36.
3. *The Bhagavadgita*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, London, 1948. On verse 30 this editor stresses the need for repentance accompanying the devotion. On verse 32 he insists that it 'is not to be regarded as supporting the social customs debarring women and Sudras from Vedic study . . . The Gita does not sanction these social rules. The Gita gets beyond racial distinctions in its emphasis on spiritual values.' See pp. 250–3.
4. N. A. Thoothi, *The Vaishnavites of Gujarat*, Calucutta, 1935, p. 258. This classical study gives other examples; see also *Vaishnava Lyrics*, done into English by Surendranath Kumar *et al.*, Oxford, 1923.
5. Bhai Manilal C. Parekh, *Sri Vallabhacharya*, Rajkot, 1943; M. T. Kennedy, *The Chaitanya Movement*, Calcutta, 1925; H. H. Wilson, *The Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 2nd edition, 1958.
6. Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bandakar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and minor religious systems*, edited by Narayan Bapuji Utgikar, Poona, 1928, p. 72.
7. Parekh, op. cit., 1946, Appendix II.
8. Bhandakar, op. cit., p. 110.
9. Wilson, op. cit., p. 69.
10. Sir Richard Burton, *Zanzibar, City and Island*, London, 1872.
11. Karshandas Mulji published anonymously his *History of the Maharajas, or Vallabhacharyas in Western India* (London, 1865) in which details of the case, reports of the judgements delivered, and press reactions thereto, are preceded by a most tendentious account of Hinduism in general, and of the Pushti Marga in particular.
12. For a succinct account of the emergence of a socially critical press in Gujarat, see R. D. Parikh, *The Press and Society*, Bombay, 1965.
13. My suggestion here is that the Bhattia may, on their conversion to the Pushti Marga, have brought with them elements of their older adherence. H. H. Wilson, op. cit., p. 138, writing of Shaktipuja, says: 'one of the principal rites . . . is the actual worship of the daughter or wife of a Brahman, and leads with one branch of the sect at least to the introduction of gross impurities.' See *History of the Sect of the Maharajas*, pp. 20, 30.
14. *History of the Sect of the Maharajas*, pp. 139, 142, 144–5.

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6

A Reformed Sect—the Satsang

The authority of Vallabhachārya was allowed to descend by physical inheritance and no care was taken to set up a teaching order which could promulgate and develop his teachings. This seems to have been the great weakness of the Pushti Marga, one which the founder of the Satsang was careful to avoid. In addition, as we shall see, his doctrine of *bhakti* was more controlled, and his insistence on separation of the sexes absolute.

My experience of the Satsang is intimately associated with the memory of my friend Swāmidās, whose difficulties over the Bombay apples I mentioned earlier. He was a landowner and an efficient business man who included among his concerns an important oil agency and, in his village, a small foundry for making spare parts. He was a major partner in the small company that owned, amongst other things, the irrigation works at Sundarana where he had built a small bungalow in a garden; this I shared as an office with Kishor the manager on the spot, and as a sleeping space with the boys who maintained the pumps. Swāmidās was a dedicated follower of Swāmi Narāyan whom he worshipped as Lord, *avatār* of Krishna. His wife, his large family and many of his relatives had joined him in the sect and he was, unlike many, an active missionary, ready to discuss with anybody the beauties and virtues of the Satsang. I remember witnessing one of those impossible situations, sometimes described by

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others, when this *bhagat* was confronted by a rather simple-minded young Jesuit who was visiting me one day. Swāmidās sat down to enjoy a conversation about God with a fellow *bhagat*. His own position was clear enough: Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, were all manifestations to different peoples at different times of the one Lord, Swāmi Narāyan. The attitude of the priest was simpler still; as Swāmidās drove me home to his village for lunch he came as near to condemning a man as I ever heard him do. It had not, I think, occurred to him that one could condemn someone else's beliefs as not merely erroneous, but as positively false and evil.

I first met Swāmidās entirely by chance. I was making a tour of the villages in the very early days looking for one in which to settle. My criteria were of the vaguest; I suppose I had some relatively manageable size in mind. My guide was a distant relative of Swāmidās who, naturally, took me to see his wealthy kinsman. Swāmidās took charge of me immediately in a very endearing and unpossessive way, introduced me to the group of his regular friends who met at least once a day in his office to drink tea, chose Sundarana for me and drove me out there that day. After I had been settled in Sundarana for about a week Swāmidās turned up one day with an already over-crowded car and announced that they were off to Vadtāl; it was *punam*, the festival of the full moon.

The journey to Vadtāl took us about an hour, we travelled in the heat of the day, arriving at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Almost immediately we went in to have *darshan*.

The temple, built in the nineteenth century, is on much the same scale as a rural parish church in England of the same period. The exterior is not ornate, but the internal stonework is covered in pictures executed in rather harsh colours. According to tradition, Swāmi Narāyan himself participated in its construction. The building is dedicated to Laxminarāyan, which is to say Vishnu in association with

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Laxshmi, goddess of good fortune. Stone steps lead up to the main entrance, and on the threshold one is confronted by three alcoves, or shrines, occupying the far wall. In these are set, three by three, various images, their names painted in black on the wall above. In front of these shrines runs a rail which constrains the faithful to pass in file, and the order is from right to left.

The central image and the largest is, as one might expect, that of Laxminarāyan, but it is not the most important. It is the image on the observer's far left as he enters the temple which receives the greatest veneration, the image to which the worshipper comes last. It is believed to be the *svarupa* of Swami Narayan, and he is said to have pronounced an identity between it, his historical fleshly existence and his being in heaven. The shift of importance from the central image to the *svarupa* of the Swami reflects something of the changes which occurred in his own lifetime, as we shall shortly see.

After *darshan* we joined our friends in the temple courtyard and it was interesting to note, from an aside to one of his friends, that Swāmidās had expected me to have some special experience as I had *darshan* of that final image. In reply to the half-heard inquiry I heard him say, 'No, not yet.'

We then visited the buildings which face on to the four sides of the temple courtyard. A large part of these is given over to the ascetic members of the sect and the temple priesthood. Others are crowded with relics of Swāmi Narāyan. Each room is a shrine and there are many life-size representations of Swāmi Narāyan made of painted wood. These were very different from the *svarupa* image in the temple which, like most representations of the deity in Gujarati temples, made no attempt at realism and was the usual large-eyed, highly stylized form.

As Swāmi Narāyan died in 1830 and, in the course of his lifetime, achieved divinity, or something like it, it is not

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surprising that the number of relics is considerable. Individual items which stand out in the memory are an entire bullock-cart in which he made a journey, an ornamental *gadi*, a large raised seat from which he preached, and a much venerated paper bearing his footprints in red. Apart from these, there were piles of wooden sandals, heaps of rosaries, turbans, coats, *dhoti* and other articles of dress. I said earlier that any holy man who wins the devotion of a family is likely to leave some article of dress, a cooking vessel or a sandal behind him as a memorial. It is not difficult to imagine that, even before Swāmi Narāyan came to be venerated as the Godhead, any article which had been in contact with him should have been carefully preserved.

After this visit to the relics I experienced something very characteristic of this sect. The group of us who had come with Swāmidās, and some others from other villages, all, as far as I could judge, substantial landowners and businessmen, forgathered in a room set aside by the temple authorities as a temporary lodgement for one of the preceptors of the sect. This was a very elderly man, a Brahman from Umreth, revered by this particular group as their *guruji*, honoured teacher. He was a married man and a householder, and although he had now given himself up entirely to devotional practices, he had been a substantial landowner and cotton merchant. It was explained to me that the authorities of the sect, fully appreciating the changes taking place in the modern world, had thought it best to appoint such members of the laity whose orthodoxy was unquestioned, but who at the same time were thoroughly conversant with the difficulties and temptations, intellectual doubts and failings of those obliged to live and work in the modern world. He was already in his eighties when I had my *darshan* of him and died shortly afterwards. He was succeeded by one of the group, an energetic and successful lawyer in his mid-fifties.

The *guruji* asked a few questions about myself, my

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presence and interests and about Christianity; he also presented me with a scented leaf, *kevaḍo*, *pandanus odoratissimus*, from the temple. This participated in the sanctity of *prasād*, although it was obviously not for eating. For the rest of the time, about half an hour, we sat in silence while the *guruji* carried on quiet conversation with individuals sitting near him.

After we had sat for about twenty minutes, one of the group got up and abased himself in front of the *guruji* asking leave to withdraw. The *guruji* looked up and said, 'No, sit for ten minutes more.' The man withdrew back to his place. After the ten minutes the *guruji* gave us all leave to depart and only his chief disciple and successor remained with him. I was given to understand afterwards that this imposition of a period of sitting was an important element in the discipline of the sect. Swāmidās told me that it was necessarily arbitrary and the period of sitting might be prolonged for an hour or more. 'Especially when you are young,' he said, 'you're thinking of getting back to your family and your business and it is very necessary to learn that these are secondary things. We have to obey *guruji* without question. If he were to tell me tomorrow to sell my business I'd do it. I wouldn't like it, but I'd do it.'

Apart from these *guru* formally appointed to certain sections of the laity, the local communities of the faithful in the villages tend to throw up their own leaders. In Swāmidās' own village there was such a man with the rather unusual name of Umadbhai, which I take it, derives from the Arabic for noble or illustrious. In my experience it is most uncommon for people in this part of the world not to take their name from a sanskritic name or epithet of God. The only general exception to this, and it is a practice falling into disrepute, is the giving of some derogatory name to a child, such as Dungheap, Punjo, or, another common one, Rooster, Margho, when it is feared that the child might otherwise attract the evil eye or envy.

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Umadbhai had married off his children and had sufficient income from his land for his general needs. He devoted himself almost entirely to the study of the sectarian literature and to the worship of the image in the local Swāmi Narāyan temple in the village. After the *guruji*, Swāmidās revered Umadbhai as the authority in his life.

After we had taken leave of *guruji* we piled back into Swāmidās' car and drove back to his village. Whereas on the journey to Vadtāl we had spent our time chatting and joking now the mood was entirely different. Swāmidās and his friends gave themselves over to *japa* which literally means muttering as a man might mutter his prayers. It has taken on a more ritualized significance in sectarian contexts and means the prolonged repetition of a divine name or a supplication. Sometimes the *japa* resembles more one of our own repetitive litanies. On this occasion the group intoned the name Swāmi Narāyan over and over again all the way home.

Although there are many distinctive things about the life and church of Swāmi Narāyan, his beginnings appear to have been very much like those of other great founders of movements in India.[1] He was born in 1781 near Ayodhya. His father was Hariprasād Pande, a Sarvaria Brahman. The boy was named Ghanshyāma, a name of Krishna, and his parents died when he was about nine years old. According to tradition, when he was 'eleven years, three months and one day old' he left home leaving an elder and a younger brother behind him. There is naturally enough very little authentic record of how Ghanshyāma passed the years before he became known in Gujarat. Apart from various miraculous events it seems certain that he passed some of his time among yogis and was formally initiated for a second time as a *sannyāsi*, taking the name Nilkantha Brahmachāri. In Saurashtra 'seven years, one month and eleven days' after he had left his home in Uttar Pradesh he came into contact

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with the followers of Swāmi Rāmananda and was invited to settle with them. Swāmi Rāmananda was himself away at that time and a letter, written by one of his disciples, describes Nilkantha as follows:

> He is quite young but highly proficient in yoga . . . [He] has yellow hair on his head, a big tulsi bead round his neck, a girdle round his waist, a deerskin, a rosary, a kerchief, a piece of cloth for filtering water and a small manuscript. He does not take any solid food and so all the veins in his body look green in colour; nor does there seem to be any blood in his body, and if a woman's shadow approaches him he vomits. He has too many great and noble qualities to be mentioned in this letter . . .[2]

The small manuscript referred to may have been a summary of the Bhagavagita, written in his own hand and still preserved at Vadtāl. The tradition is that he learnt of the Gita from his yoga teacher, Gopāla Yogi, whom he had met on his wanderings. His reaction to the presence of women is evidence of the *brahmacharya*, celibacy, which marks his later teaching and organization.

Swāmi Rāmananda, some forty years older than Nilkantha, came from Bihar. As a *sannyāsi* he had been initiated into the teachings of Shankarachārya but had abandoned his *guru* in search of a more personal God. In south India he came under the influence of Rāmanujachārya's teaching, to which I have referred, and this he passed on to Nilkantha. The doctrine of *vishishtadvaitvad*, qualified non-dualism, became the central doctrine in the Satsang of the relation of soul to the divine.

When Swāmi Rāmananda returned to his disciples he found Nilkantha already well established among them and initiated him into his order under the dual name Swāmi Sahājananda and Narāyana. When the historical personality is referred to in the sectarian literature the name Swāmi Sahājananda is most commonly used. Narāyan was the name

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which the Swāmi preferred above all others for the divine, and by the association of himself with that divine he came to be called Swāmi Narāyan—in which name the name and the divine are blended.

It seems that even in the lifetime of Swāmi Rāmananda something more than a mere wandering band of ascetics had been formed. There were temples in different parts of Gujarat and an established body of preaching *sādhus*. As Swāmi Rāmananda came towards the end of his life he persuaded Sahājananda to succeed him as Achārya. This appointment over the head of many senior disciples caused some dissension and there was a schism which appears to have left the dissenters with the temples, and Sahājananda with the greater part of the brotherhood. The following years saw a phenomenal increase in his following. He was clearly an extremely vigorous preacher and travelled up and down Gujarat promulgating what seemed to be his quite distinctive ideas. Tradition and the testimony of eye-witnesses credit him with some extraordinary hypnotic power which enabled him to put not only individuals but entire congregations into a trance or *samādhi*. This seems to be more than just another of the miraculous powers with which such leaders are often accredited. The reports of mass hypnosis appear to have caused concern to some of the older disciples who had lived with him under Swāmi Rāmananda, and were nearly a cause of further schism.[3]

Swāmi Rāmananda must have died round about the year 1800 and Sahājananda therefore took over the leadership when he was only nineteen years of age, or thereabouts. He himself died in 1830 by which time his following had increased to many thousands. The manner in which he built up and maintained his following, and evolved an organization to meet each increase in size, suggests that he had a genius for organization.

The first innovatory step that he appears to have taken was the initiation of his celibate following as *paramhansa*.

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The word *paramhansa* implies a very high evolution of spirit, and although there may be dispute as to who is a genuine *paramhansa*, there is no doubt that to be one is to have achieved one of the highest orders of asceticism. According to texts the *paramhansa* is *avyaktalinga*, without any external signs, and *avyaktacāra*, having no settled way of life. He does not spend more than one night in the same village, more than five nights in the same town, or more than seven nights in the same field. He discards all the formal external signs which mark the holy man, including the begging bowl. It is said that his stomach should be his begging bowl, and this implies that he should receive no alms other than food, and no more food than his stomach can carry. Some carry this self-abnegation so far as to go entirely naked, some are even described as madmen because they have evolved beyond all social obligation and dependence; they wander without feeling the need to communicate, meditating on the spirit. It is significant that G. S. Ghurye records that an altogether different brand of militant ascetics chose *paramhansa* to lead them in their disputes with Christian missionaries, because only these could be trusted to be free of all prejudice.[4]

Sahājananda used this belief about the *paramhansa*, apparently quite deliberately, to meet the persecution which his followers were suffering. They had incurred the envy and hostility of rival sects and had to suffer physical maltreatment, even death; also they were subject to spiritual danger in that they were sometimes deliberately offered polluted foods. Some of their persecutors went so far as to deprive them of the images, essential objects of their daily worship, to which they had to offer food before they could themselves eat. By elevating them to the rank of *paramhansa* Sahājananda rendered them socially invisible, so to speak; they now bore no external marks which might identify them as a band. Their new status also elevated them above the consideration of purity and impurity, so that while they would make every effort to avoid contaminated food and drink, they could not

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suffer the spiritual damage which these things must otherwise inevitably cause. At this period his ascetic followers ate and drank together without any consideration of their former caste allegiances.

The literature of the sect represents this move as a temporary one to meet the difficulties of the times. It is certain that when both his own position was well established, and the stabilizing power of British government had begun to make itself felt, Sahājananda not merely did not initiate any more *paramhansa,* but strictly forbade his *sādhus* to abandon caste orthodoxy.

There seems no doubt that the Satsang benefited by the establishment of British rule in Gujarat. It is believed that Sahājananda predicted their coming and there is no doubt that he was regarded by the British officials as a wholesome and stabilizing element. It is worth quoting at some length from the journals of Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta, who, shortly before his death in 1826, made a grand tour from Calcutta to Bombay.[5] The Bishop arrived in Baroda in March 1825, and travelled west across the Mahi river into the Kaira district of Gujarat. On 25 March he camped at Amod where he recorded an account given him by Mr. Williamson, the British resident at the court of Baroda, concerning the general 'state of rebellion' in Saurashtra and in Kutch. From these regions armed bands made frequent forays into the fertile areas of central Gujarat which were, at that time, divided up between the Gaikwad of Baroda and the British. The Bishop's account continues:

> Some good had been done, Mr. Williamson said, among many of these wild people, by the preaching and popularity of the Hindoo reformer, Swaamee Narain, who had been mentioned to me at Baroda.

I break off here to note that the only likely reference in the Baroda entry is to a 'new sect of Hindoos' about which he questioned a visiting prince from Saurashtra. He had been

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told that this man had attempted to suppress the sect by force of arms and, in reply to the Bishop's question, the prince replied

> in rather a fretful tone that 'there were too many of them,' and in reply to a question, what their religion was?—that 'they had no religion at all, but a hatred of their superiors, and of all lawful authority'.[6]

I resume my quotation from the entry for 25 March.

> His [Swāmi Narāyan] morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the Shaster [Anglo-Indian corruption of *shastra*]. He preached a great degree of purity, forbidding his disciples so much as to look on any woman whom they passed. He condemned theft and bloodshed; and those villages and districts which had received him, from being among the worst, were now among the best and most orderly in the provinces. Nor was this all, insomuch as he was said to have destroyed the yoke of caste,—to have preached one God, and, in short, to have made so considerable approaches to the truth, that I could not but hope he might be an appointed instrument to prepare the way for the Gospel.

It was while he was listening to Mr. Williamson's account that he received six visitors who presented him with the normal offering of sweets and announced that the 'Pundit Swaamee Narain sends his salam'; and, being in the neighbourhood, the Swāmi asked permission to call on the Bishop the following day. The Rajput spokesman of the group told him that the old man accompanying them was a Muslim, a servant to one of their number, and, says the Bishop:

> Added that, though of different castes, they were all disciples of Swaamee Narain, and taught to regard each other as brethren.

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The Bishop clearly implies here that the Muslim was a member of the Satsang and this may, indeed, have been possible at that time. Even today there are many Muslims in Gujarat whose knowledge of their own faith is shadowy in the extreme and who may well revere local holy men, just as Momad participated in the *bhajan mandali* in Sundarana, without for all that imagining that they are obliged to renounce such Islam as they have. Today actual membership of the sect would involve a more formal commitment.

On 26 March Bishop Heber arrived at Nadiad, a large important town of the Kaira district, mentioned as early as 1638 by Mandelslo as a 'centre for the production of both cotton and indigo'.[7]

> About eleven o'clock I had the expected visit from Swaamee Narain, to my interview with whom I had looked forward with an anxiety and eagerness which, if he had known it, would, perhaps, have flattered him. He came in a somewhat different style from all which I had expected, having with him near two hundred horsemen, mostly well armed with matchlocks and swords, and several of them with coats of mail and spears. Besides them he had a large rabble on foot, with bows and arrows;

The Bishop reflects wryly that his own retinue was considerably smaller and laments the fact that two religious teachers should meet 'with the rattling of quivers, the clash of shields, and the tramp of the warhorse'. He does make the point, however, that his own troops 'though less numerous, would have been, doubtless, far more effective, from the superiority of arms and discipline'. He goes on to compare the attitude of his own troops, who guarded him because they were ordered to do so, with the guards of the Swāmi, who were in addition his ardent admirers and disciples. After expressing great hope that one day a Christian minister might be so surrounded in India, he goes on to describe his meeting with Sahājananda:

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> The holy man . . . was a middle-sized, thin, plain looking person, about my own age, [42] with a mild and diffident expression of countenance, but nothing about him indicative of any extraordinary talent.

He seated the Swāmi on his right hand, and after the usual civilities invited him to meet him at Kaira Town 'where we should have more leisure'. The Bishop's hope was that at Kaira he would be able to present Sahājananda with a copy of the scriptures in Devnagari and further persuade him to go with him to Bombay:

> Where I hope that by conciliatory treatment, and the conversation to which I might introduce him with the Church Missionary Society established in that neighbourhood, I might do him more good than I could otherwise hope to do.

Sahājananda declined the invitation saying that he was extremely busy; he had five thousand disciples in the neighbouring villages whom he was now visiting. In the following week some fifty thousand from different parts of Gujarat were due to assemble for the occasion of his nephew's investiture with the *janoi*, sacred thread. If the Bishop were staying longer in the district he, Sahājananda, would be happy to see him once he had got this ceremony out of the way. The Bishop then asked him to divulge some of his teaching and, reports Heber:

> He began, indeed, well, professing to believe in one only God, the Maker of all things in Heaven and Earth, who filled all space, upheld and governed all things, and more particularly dwelt in the hearts of those who diligently sought him; but he alarmed me by calling the God whom he worshipped, Krishna, and by saying that he came down to earth in ancient times, had been put to death by wicked men through magic, and that since his time many false

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revelations had been pretended and many false divinities set up.

The grounds for the Bishop's alarm were that 'notwithstanding the traits of resemblance which [this declaration] bore to the history of our Lord', the name Krishna was associated with 'uncleanness and folly in the popular legends'. To the apparent gratification of the Swāmi and his following, the Bishop then asked whether Brahma, rather than Krishna, was not the God and Father of all. Sahājananda 'smiled and bowed and with the air of a man who is giving instruction to a willing and promising pupil', explained that there were indeed many names for the one God: he continued

> But there is a spirit in whom God is more especially, and who cometh from God, and is with God, and is likewise God, who hath made known to men the will of the God and Father of all, whom we call Krishna and worship as God's image, and believe to be the same as the 'Surya' [sun].

The Bishop, obviously struck by this parallel with the doctrines of the incarnation, a parallel which has lost nothing in his rendering of it, thought that he saw a 'fair opportunity' and agreed 'that God is everywhere, and that there is no other besides him'. This gained him a cry of 'Allah Akbar', Victory to Allah, from one of the Muslims in the room. The Bishop then seems to have alienated this supporter by proceeding to a brief outline of the doctrine of the incarnation in terms of the logos and the sonship of Christ. 'Here one of the Mussulmans left the room; perceiving which and being anxious to keep the remainder a little longer', Heber addressed himself to the elderly Muslim attendant who had first announced the Swāmi's intending visit. He appealed to him on the grounds of Mohammed's own writings concerning Mary and Jesus, resting his case on what I take to be

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sura III of the Koran, verse 40, which he also takes as evidence for the Incarnation. He then returned to the Swāmi, arguing that the word of God which proceeds from and is one with God, can in no way be equated with the sun 'since the sun rises and sets, is sometimes on this side of the world and sometimes on that' whereas God is everywhere. Swāmi Narāyan appears to have replied that he had not meant to say that the sun *was* God, but *like* God in brightness and glory. Their belief was, he continued, that there had been many *avatāra* in different times and lands and added, 'something like a hint that another *avatāra* of Krishna, or the Sun, had taken place in himself'.

A little later the Bishop asked for a description of the form of worship and had the Lord's Prayer recited in Hindustani as an example. He was misunderstood as asking *in* what form God was worshipped and was consequently confronted with

> a large picture in glaring colours, of a naked man with rays proceeding from his face like the sun, and two women fanning him; the man white, the women black.

The Bishop's reaction to this was to give Sahājananda to understand what both Christianity and Islam taught about image worship, although, as he says, his 'fluency had begun to fail'.

Having received some 'paltry little prints of his divinity in various attitudes' the Bishop turned the conversation to ask the Swāmi's opinions on the system of caste:

> to which he answered, that he did not regard the subject as of much importance, but that he wished not to give offence; that people might eat separately or together in this world but that above . . . pointing to heaven, those distinctions would cease where we should be all 'ek ekhee jat' [all of one caste].

The interview concluded with the exchange of gifts and

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the promise of mutual prayers. It was plain to the Bishop that Sahājananda's 'advances towards truth had not yet been so great' as he had been told, but that he exercised his great power over 'a wild people' to good purpose. The Bishop concludes this section of his entry as follows:

> I thought from all which I saw that it would be to no advantage to ask him to accompany me to Bombay.

I have quoted at length from this account of an historic encounter not only because it is amusing in a sad sort of way but also because it fairly represents the reputation which Sahājananda had with the British. The whole conversation, brief as it is, reveals the breadth and the depth of misunderstanding between these two excellent men. It is the only recorded instance of direct contact between Sahājananda and a Christian missionary, but it is likely enough that, given his relatively good relations with British officials, he may subsequently have come to learn something of Christian doctrines. Some elements of the teaching accredited to him by tradition suggest an element of Christian influence, either on his exegetes or upon the faithful more generally. There is, however, no suggestion that he himself was directly influenced nor that the reforms which he preached were instigated with one eye upon British opinion. His message was formulated and promulgated long before they had established themselves as the paramount power in this part of India.

That the British regarded Sahājananda as a force making for 'law and order' is clear from the account given to Bishop Heber by Mr. Williamson. Towards the end of his life in 1830, the Swāmi visited the Governor of Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, then at Rajkot. According to British accounts the Swāmi was accorded a military escort and was met by the Governor and his aides outside the Political Agent's bungalow; once inside the two discoursed on religious matters. On his departure the Swāmi was presented with 'a pair of

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shawls and other piece goods' and gave, in his turn, a copy of his Precepts, known as the *Shikshāpatri*, to the Governor.[8]

In the iconography of the sect this episode is represented in a contemporary painting which I cannot unfortunately reproduce here. It depicts Sahājananda seated on a *gādi*, elevated on a dais, and surrounded by his disciples. Before him, at a respectful distance, stands the Governor of Bombay and his retinue, wearing what appears to be black official dress which contrasts sharply with their bright pink, bare feet. Their bright pink faces are bowed over bright pink joined hands. This view of the matter is supported by the manual of devotion known as the *Satsangi Jivanam*, where the Governor is described as running with all his following barefooted to greet the Swāmi on his arrival at Rajkot, and prostrating himself to become his disciple.[9]

What did Sahājananda teach? He is not to be regarded as a great *achārya* in the traditional sense, in that he did not propound a distinctive philosophy of his own. On the contrary he maintains throughout his writings that he adheres to the *vishistadvaita*, qualified monism, of Rāmanujachārya.

As may well be imagined, the refinements of theology do not enter into the day-to-day beliefs and practices of the majority of the sect. This adherence to Rāmanujachārya has, however, two significant aspects which are worth noting. In the first place, apart from a few minority sects such as that of his own preceptor, the dominant influence in Gujarat of his time was that of the descendants of Vallabhachārya, from whom Sahājananda wished to dissociate himself. In the second place the *bhakti* doctrine of Rāmanujachārya is altogether more complicated, and requires far more discipline, than the same doctrine represented by Vallabhachārya's exegetes.

For Rāmanujachārya *bhakti* is a condition which is dependent upon *karmayoga*, the performance of action, rites and

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ceremonies without regard for the fruits resulting from them, and upon *jnanayoga*, the acquisition of knowledge arising from the right practice of *karmayoga*. This *jnanayoga* leads to *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is itself a yoga and involves purification of the body, chastity, constant application, general moral rectitude and non-violence, the absence of despair and desire. This *bhakti* leads to the final knowledge. Rāmanujachārya distinguishes it quite clearly from what he calls *prapatti*, which corresponds much more to what we in the West would recognize as a blind and simple faith. It requires only a sense of total helplessness and dependent reliance upon God. Significantly this *prapatti* is available to all castes whereas *bhaktiyoga*, as defined by Rāmanujachārya, is limited to the twice-born. The reader will recognize in this *prapatti* the *popular* representation of the *bhakti* doctrine as I have described it earlier, and as it is expounded and practised by Vallabhachārya's descendants. Finally, the greater asceticism and control involved in Rāmanujachārya's *bhaktiyoga* may be associated with a third aspect which clearly separates the followers of Sahājananda from those of Vallabhachārya This is the complete absence of references in Rāmanujachārya's writings to Radha, the divine consort of Krishna, and the consequent lack of emphasis both on *shakti* worship and erotic symbolism.

There are two other tenets of Rāmanujachārya which are clearly active in the Satsang today. These are his doctrine of the soul, and his 'fifth way', *achāryabhimanayoga*, dependence on the preceptor.

For Rāmanuja, as for Sahājananda, the soul is an atomic, eternal, attribute of God and dependent on God. This doctrine is offensive to the monism of Shankarachārya in that it gives substantiality and agency to the soul. It conflicts also with Vallabhachārya's teaching in that it leaves no room for *pushti*, grace, by which God inflames devotion in the individual soul. The doctrine seems to have had an important effect on the members of the Satsang (here I report

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a strong personal impression) in that they seem more committed than others to getting on with the *job* of their salvation, seeing it as a task in which they actively co-operate. To introduce a distinction, found elsewhere in India, which is applied to two schools of thought deriving from Rāmanujachārya's teaching, the members of the Satsang are like baby monkeys who take a fast grip on their mother's abdomen, and thus are conveyed to safety. Such tenacious souls are contrasted with the kittens which, when in danger, sit and wait for their mothers to carry them away by the scruff of their necks without themselves giving active assistance. The distinction is similar to the Western distinction between salvation through works and salvation through grace.

The *achāryabhimanayoga* is a very interesting doctrine in that it gives a special place to the *achārya*, *guru* or preceptor, in the salvation of his disciples. This doctrine also requires a total dependence, but now the dependence is upon the preceptor; one submits oneself to him in all matters and without question. The preceptor takes upon himself the business of the disciple's salvation and does all the necessary work. The disciple's contribution is simply his faith and obedience. Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, whose authority must carry great weight, says that this doctrine 'seems suspicious. It has a striking resemblance to the Christian doctrine of Christ's suffering.' He goes on:

> If the prevalence of Christianity in and before the time of Ramanuja in the country about Madras is a proved fact, this doctrine as well as some of the finer points in the theory of Prapatti may be traced to the influence of Christianity.[10]

The traditions of the Satsang record that Sahājananda, when he succeeded Swāmi Rāmananda, asked that he should be allowed to take upon himself the sorrows and misfortunes which his followers might suffer as a result of sins com-

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mitted in previous incarnations. This can be seen to be a development from, and an expansion of, Rāmanuja's original teaching. If comparisons with Christianity are looked for, we may also note at this point the very strong belief in the sect that at the moment of death Sahājananda appears in person to the dying man to comfort him and take him away.[11]

I have treated these doctrines in a rather cursory manner because the average Satsangi is as ignorant of them as the average Christian is of his own theology and philosophy. I should qualify that remark immediately by saying that the average Satsangi probably does in fact read more of his sacred and approved literature than the average Christian, at least in Anglo-Saxon countries. However, it is still true to say that the basic teaching of Sahājananda, as it affects day-to-day life in society, is contained in the *Shikshāpatri*, the Book of Precepts, which Sahājananda ordered should be worshipped as a representative of his very self, *svarupa*.[12]

Here I would like to draw attention to some aspects of this remarkable work. It strikes the Western mind as a puritanical document by its insistence upon the segregation of the sexes in all sacred matters, the avoidance of sexual sins, and of all the possible circumstances in which they might occur. It is also puritanical in an older sense. The Satsangi who obeys the Precepts emerges as a sober, cautious man of the world. He keeps daily accounts, he pays his workers their due, he is not extravagant either in sacred or secular matters, and even in business dealings involving kinsmen he is careful to have a proper contract drawn up which is signed in the presence of impartial witnesses. He is a man of good sense: in times of disaster and difficulty he will devote himself to the preservation of himself and his dependants and let other duties ride for a while. He is by no means a fanatic and recognizes that the Precepts, whether they relate to spiritual or secular matters, must be adapted to the circumstances of time, place, age, means and rank.

What I myself find most striking about the *Shikshāpatri* is

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its very marked sectarian quality; it lays down very precisely the kind of worship in which a Satsangi may involve himself. Those precepts which positively enjoin certain kinds of behaviour are not so remarkable as those which expressly forbid, or modify, certain others. Almost every work of a similar nature, addressed to a lay following, will prescribe what marks must be worn on the brow, where and in what way the divine is to be worshipped. But these injunctions are usually added to the accumulated body of beliefs and practice, and seldom act in such a way as to modify or preclude some of them. There is, in other words, a tendency in the *Shikshāpatri* towards a kind of exclusivism, an absolutism, which seems to me to mark a radical innovation. This has certainly developed since Sahājananda's time, as I shall shortly describe.

The new tendency is most marked in the way in which the *Shikshāpatri* makes it quite impossible for a Satsangi to be in any way involved in what I have called the impure cult. They are not to eat the *prasād* of Kāli because she is usually offered flesh or liquor. They are not to eat the *prasād* even of Krishna if the offering has, in the first place, been made by a man of inferior caste. When troubled by a ghost the Satsangi will have recourse to the *mantra* laid down by Sahājananda and not to that of an 'inferior' god: both the Sanskrit and Gujarati are quite explicit here, the word is *kshud* which means trifling, petty, worthless. Shiva is to be accepted with Narāyan as one god, but only images which have been sanctified by the *achārya* are to be worshipped, that is offered *puja*. To other images an obeisance is sufficient. If the Satsangi happens upon a Shiva temple, or the temple of some other god, he should make obeisance and go in for *darshan*, but no more.

The Pushti Marga of Vallabachārya is referred to explicitly only once when the fasts, festivals, and modes of worship laid down by Vallabhachārya's son Vitthal are also prescribed for the members of the Satsang. There are, how-

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ever, several implicit references to the known practices of that sect. The *achārya*, for example, may not initiate a woman; that is left to his wife. The reference in verses 73–4 to 'unrighteous acts performed by great persons in the past' which are not to be imitated, preclude the acceptance of some of Krishna's amorous adventures as examples for emulation. The injunction on ascetics, that they are to have nothing to do with men dressed as women, refers to some of the more dramatic performances in the rituals of the Pushti Marga. In short Sahajananda in his *Shikshāpatri* set an example of worldly good sense for his followers, in that he avoids any direct critical reference to that body of believers from which he was most concerned to dissociate his following, while tacitly achieving his ends.

I have several times referred to Sahājananda's capacity as an organizer. The sect has not been entirely free of schism, nor has it been able to avoid the disputes over property which almost inevitably arise once wealth has been accumulated. However, the fact that it has avoided these evils to a great extent, and continued to grow in numbers and reputation, is due in large part to Sahājananda's foresight

There is some doubt as to whether Vallabhachārya was himself a *sannyāsi* or not. It is certain, however, that the subsequent teaching of his sect discounts the advantages of asceticism. A by-product of this emphasis, regretted by some present-day members of the sect as much as by sympathizers outside it, is the lack of any group in the Pushti Marga dedicated to scholarship and the ongoing exegesis of Vallabhachārya's doctrine. Vitthal, who may be regarded as the second founder of the sect, seems to have been an imaginative genius in matters of ritual and associated beliefs, but he committed his entire inheritance to his heredity. His sons and their descendants were the sole recipients of spiritual authority from the past, and immense adulation and wealth from the present. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the tradition of learning tended, with some

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exceptions, to be lost, and that the Maharajas came to be surrounded with a corrupting veneration more appropriate to images.

I have mentioned Sahājananda's use of the *paramhansa* concept to free his *sādhus* from persecution. His first major act of organization also related to the *sādhu* body which, at the time of his death, amounted to something over three thousand. As can be seen in the *Shikshāpatri*, Sahājananda divided his *sādhus* according to their castes and, by thus abandoning the *paramhansa* notion, almost certainly increased their numbers. Some years before he died he also divided them up into sections under *sādguru* to whom they were subject in spiritual and disciplinary matters. Later, to avoid rivalries and unedifying competition, the *sādhus* associated with particular temples were allocated 'parishes' within which to preach.

This allocation of particular *sādhu* to particular areas was a recognition that the following of Sahājananda now included a substantial body of the laity; the realization that he had particular spiritual obligations to this laity marks, I think, the development from a movement to a sect, or even Church. This growth was made certain in the last decade of his life which saw the building of the three most important temples of Ahmedabad, Vadtāl and Gadhada. Since that time many other temples have been built and Satsangis have carried their faith to East Africa and to Fiji, but these three original temples remain the chief centres of pilgrimage.

The accumulation of property raised questions and problems of ownership, and to meet these Sahājananda had recourse to heredity. He adopted the eldest sons of his elder and younger brother and appointed them *achārya* of the North and South. In their hands was vested the property of the Satsang and the rite of formal initiation.[13] The two *achārya* were to be married men and their duties were to devolve on their sons. Although Sahājananda called these two successors *achārya*, philosopher, teacher, their position is

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rather that of the monarch in the English system as head of the state and church.

The *achārya* are expected to lead exemplary and even edifying lives, but they are not regarded as great sources of insight into the tradition, nor is any great innovation in doctrine expected of them. Typical of their activities is the publication of the Gujarati translation from the Sanskrit of the *Satsingijivanam* which was produced at the order of one of them and of which he is the publisher, located at Vadtāl.[14] All approved editions and translations published by the sect carry on the flyleaf 'By Order of the Acharya Maharaj'. We can say that the material succession of the Satsang has been separated from the spiritual succession in the manner most appropriate to both. The property of the temple is vested in the *achārya*, but it is not his domestic residence, as it would be for the descendants of Vallabhachārya; the development and promulgation of doctrine is in the hands of ascetics and laymen dedicated to the work.

There is little of importance in the history of the *achārya*. There have inevitably been disagreements over the use of funds which have resulted in an increasing limitation of their personal powers. The only scandal which has occurred affected the fourth *achārya* at Vadtāl, who was deposed. Originally the senior *achārya* was based at Ahmedabad and the junior one at Vadtāl, but it appears that the junior line died out after the third generation and the *gādi* of Vadtāl passed into a separate branch of the Ahmedabad family. There have been subsequently several such 'replacements' from line to line in similar circumstances, but it is interesting to note that the hereditary principle is subordinated to the rule that the two *gādi* must be kept separate. Up to the present, no one has sat on either *gādi* who is directly descended from one who has sat on the other.

How does the Satsang appear in the eyes of outsiders, and how does membership of the sect affect beliefs about caste status? I visited Vadtāl several times with Swāmidās and

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only once without him. This was when I was visiting the nearby village of Jor, a village with which the Patidar of Sundarana had strong marriage relations. My companion was Kishor and, as he had not been to Vadtāl, he suggested that we take it in on our way home. We walked into the temple compound and were making our way up the steps to the main door when one of the attendants shouted out and drew our attention to a large notice that I had not observed before, hanging over the main door. The message was simple: the temple was the private property of the Satsang and only initiated believers were permitted within. Kishor was extremely put out by this incident; on the way home in the train I had to listen to a mixture of mumble and tirade against Swāmi Narāyan and all his works. He represented the Satsang to me as a body of spiritual snobs who thought themselves a cut above everybody else, as a load of hypocrites, as a rich man's club whose sole purpose was to assist its members in business affairs. 'Look at that so-and-so carpenter,' he said, 'there's an uppity bastard for you, if you like. You watch, when they come to the village, he is all over them with his "Jay Swāmi Narāyan". That's how he gets his contracts. *Dhong ane dhandho, saheb, dhong ane dhando*—Sir, it's all hypocrisy and business.'

The carpenter was the only really effective one in the village. He had succeeded in developing a reputation and a trade which went beyond the confines of Sundarana. He was by no means dependent upon such works as even a relatively wealthy man like Kishor could put in his way.

There had been an incident a year or so back when Kishor, after the completion of some work on his house, had invited the carpenter and other workmen to a meal. The carpenter arrived, but when he realized that the food to be served had been cooked by Surajben, a Patidar, he refused to sit down and eat. The Precepts of Swāmi Narāyan do not require that a carpenter should refuse food from a superior caste and insist upon eating food cooked by a Brahman only.

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By refusing food from Surajben's kitchen he was making a claim to equality, if not indeed superiority of status. As a man of relative financial independence he could tell Kishor what to do with his food, and the very act of rejection gave him, automatically, some standing in the eyes of other less fortunately placed villagers.

His refusal to eat food cooked by Surajben does not, however, imply that he would refuse to eat food cooked by, shall we say, Swāmidās' wife, nor would this be directly because both he and Swāmidās were members of the same sect. In the first place the carpenter would be concerned with his own status in his own village and, to the extent that he was concerned to better himself, he would wish to assert this status against the Patidar of his own village. In other words it would not occur to him to assert his status absolutely over against all Patidar everywhere. In his eyes, as indeed in all our eyes, Swāmidās stood far beyond any comparison with Kishor.

Among the suburban British the fact that our neighbour has his house front painted may stimulate us to do something about our own flaking and dingy exteriors, but the façade of Buckingham Palace does not stimulate us to paint our guttering. We cannot analyse the carpenter's motives in joining the Satsang: Swāmidās was one of the local gentry whose business he was naturally happy to have. In addition, he represented for many an example of the good life in every sense. Membership of the Satsang allowed the carpenter to participate, in however limited a way, in that same good life in such a way as could only heighten his self-respect. More formally we should note that the carpenter, as an independent individual, could only, so to speak, score points off Kishor in the caste game. However autonomous he might be in spirit and material means he was still a member of the carpenter caste and, as such, inferior to the meanest Patidar in Sundarana. In the Satsang, on the other hand, even though the hierarchy of caste is recognized, membership is

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by the free adherence of the individual whose caste is, secondarily, then taken into account. In this sense the implication of sect membership accords with the doctrine of *bhakti*, whether that is understood as an emotional dependence upon the divine or the disciplined achievement of self-knowledge.

Kishor had, no doubt, his own legitimate grounds for grievance. The days on which he had to present his account book for Swāmidās' inspection were invariably tiresome. He would bath and shave with particular care, and have his household in an uproar while his fine lawn shirt and best *dhoti* were looked out. On his return he was frequently in an evil temper, in reaction, no doubt, to the deferential submissiveness which he had had to display during the day. When his senior partners visited Sundarana, Kishor was reduced to the status of a superior servant and was not expected to sit and take tea with them.

It is worth pausing here and considering what else we can learn from the relationship of Swāmidās, Kishor and the carpenter. I said that Kishor would not be expected to sit down and take tea with Swāmidās and his friends when they visited Sundarana in the evening. I must qualify this: if Swāmidās were in an expansive mood and the evening chilly he might well order tea all round. Tea in Gujarat is served nowadays in cups with saucers and when there is a largish company then the cup is the serving vessel and the saucer the drinking vessel. In this way one cup serves two to three saucersful of tea. The cup is formally intended for the person to whom it is first given and he may indeed drink it all. But when there is company, politeness, generosity or thoughts of *najar* may lead him to pour only a saucerful for himself and pass the cup; or he may pour a saucerful for someone else, hand it to him and drink the remainder himself. Certainly if he pours for someone else there is an implication both that he is the superior, and that he is making a gift. If, on the other hand, he passes the cup the suggestion is that he regards the person to whom he passes it as an equal.

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If all the company in the courtyard of the Irrigation Works, Kishor and his employees—Patidar, Bareia and Patenwadia—were drinking tea, Swāmidās would pass the cup to Kishor if he were sitting by him, but if the carpenter had joined them he would very likely pour out a saucerful for him. However, tea, especially in the way that it is made in Gujarat, is costly both in itself and for the milk and sugar which is required. Most evenings Swāmidās would call for tea for himself and his friends to the exclusion of Kishor and the others. By so doing he would draw attention to the fact that Kishor was only a junior partner and, to all intents and appearances, an employee.

On one such occasion the carpenter had come down from the village to have a word with Swāmidās. He sat respectfully on the ground a little outside the circle of Swāmidās and his group, who were sitting on concrete benches. Swāmidās asked him if he would take tea and the carpenter, politely joining his palms, excused himself. Swāmidās insisted and simultaneously poured a saucerful which he handed to the carpenter. The carpenter was not in such frequent attendance that this constituted a precedent, but it was clearly a mark of favour such as Kishor did not receive even though, when he did drink tea with Swāmidās, he would, as befitted a caste fellow, receive the cup and not the saucer given to the inferior carpenter.

To sum up: let us imagine that all are drinking tea, the carpenter included. It is quite unthinkable that the carpenter should receive a cup before Kishor, let alone that he should pass it to Kishor or, still worse, pour a saucerful for him. Would Kishor pour a saucerful of tea for the carpenter? This is a delicate question. There is no doubt that as a member of a superior caste Kishor could behave in this way, but we have already seen that the carpenter is sensitive on such matters. My guess is that the carpenter, being the man he was, would politely decline tea from the outset if he saw the risk of such a situation emerging. As for Kishor himself,

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again I guess, he would not like to run the risk of receiving yet another public rebuff from the carpenter. It is worth noting, incidentally, that the outside observer might not even notice such a rebuff were it offered. The carpenter might very well politely receive the saucer of tea at Kishor's hands and simply put it on the ground in front of him as though he were about to drink it in a little while. He could then appear to forget about it until it was too cold to drink and then with due apologies simply pour it into the earth: Kishor and others would take the point. Questions of personality aside, I conceive it possible that, in such circumstances, Kishor could pass the cup for the carpenter to serve himself and the carpenter could receive it. By doing this Kishor would forfeit nothing since the cup came from not to him, and the carpenter could accept it in so far as he would not appear to be treated as an inferior.

Are Swāmidās and the carpenter friends? People are sometimes led by the descriptions of traditional Indian society to imagine a world of rigid exclusiveness in all matters so strong as to preclude relationships which we would think of as friendly. Obsessed as we may be with the lingering values of class in our own society, the evident facts of inequality of opportunity and of economic conditions, we are still very far from the world of hierarchy. I would go so far as to say that the very rigidity of caste rule defines a fairly precise area in which people can have warm relationships of trust and confidence. When we know with precision and in detail exactly what we must not do, we have the greater freedom to do everything else.

A Patidar landowner sits down in the field to chat with his Untouchable labourer about anything under the sun, and with a degree of intimacy which depends on personal temperament and the length of their relationship. I venture to say that the two men communicate with greater ease and frankness than would an English bank manager and his junior employee, if they happened to run into each other in a pub.[15]

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Let me give the extreme example: some Patidar in Sundarana have mistresses among the Untouchables. In some cases, it is said, the husbands connive at the relationships for the sake of the money that it brings in. The Patidar returns to sleep at his own home, and his morning bath washes off the pollution of both copulation and physical contact with an Untouchable. Such relationships are often of long standing but it would not occur to the woman nor to the man that he should or could drink or eat at her hands in her home, or wherever else they might meet.

It follows from this that Swāmidās and the carpenter could be friends. In fact I do not think they were but the Satsang provides a language and an arena within which relationships like friendship, quite compatible with caste, can develop. What is of particular interest in the study of sects generally in modern India is the extent to which the relationships which they encourage correspond to growing political, economic and more general social interests shared by people of different castes—the extent to which these relationships begin to transcend caste relationships, and the extent to which a sect like the Satsang appears to encourage this transcendence.

It is a commonplace of Indian history that the sect which opposes caste regulations becomes, finally, itself a caste. Such has been the fate of the Lingayats of southern India in the past and, more recently, of the Arya Samāj. The precepts of Swāmi Narāyan fully endorse the regulations of caste, and there is nothing in the modern teaching of the sect to suggest that its leaders or influential men in any way encourage neglect of caste prescriptions. From this point of view the Satsang is essentially no different from the other sects of which we have record. If today its members stand apart from their surrounding societies, and at the same time seem to bear witness to certain changes taking place in society, it is as a result of a variety of historical and social factors.

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Most generally we can say that the Vaishnavite revival in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, coinciding with the establishment of Mogul power, introduced in north and western India a doctrine which ran counter to the older belief underlying the symbiotic relation of pure and impure acted out in traditional rituals.

Even if the followers of Valabhachārya went along with the animal sacrifices which were a part of village life, and even if, on certain occasions, they assisted at blood sacrifices in *mātā* temples, the doctrine of Vallabhachārya and the temple worship laid down by his son were essentially non-violent. Whatever else may have been attributed to the Maharajas, they never tolerated blood sacrifice in their temples. It is very likely, also, that Jainism, which established itself much earlier as the preferred sect of the higher commercial castes, had given added prestige to vegetarian and non-violent worship, even if it did not make many converts among the lower castes of Gujarat.

Swāmi Narāyan's own earliest following was amongst the turbulent lower castes of Saurashtra, and the British administrators, who were soon to follow him, admired the order and peaceableness that he preached. By the petty Rajput princes of Saurashtra, he was, however, regarded as a heretic because he formally denounced in set terms the *shaktipuja* surrounding the worship of Shiva, a cult which the Rajputs themselves, as Shivaites, endorsed.

The rapid decline of the Rajput ascendancy under the British left Swāmi Narāyan with no opponent in the countryside. The higher commercial castes, notably the Bania, were already dedicated to either Jainism or the Way of Grace, and in the villages he had to encounter no united Brahmanic opposition.

It is striking in Gujarat that although, or perhaps because, there are so many Brahman castes we do not find that association of one particular Brahman caste with another non-Brahman caste such as we find in other parts of India, and as

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may have existed in the past. Wherever we go we find different Brahmans serving one and the same caste even though these same Brahmans may dispute amongst themselves their relative places in the Brahmanic hierarchy. Among the Patidar this indifference goes so far that when a man is marrying his daughter into another family he does not even inquire the name of that family's Brahman; it is a matter of total unconcern to him that the man who performs the wedding ceremony is not of the same Brahman caste as his own family priest. It would, then, have been very difficult, if not totally impossible, for the Brahmans of Gujarat in the nineteenth century to join together and oppose the teachings of Swāmi Narāyan, even if they had wished so to do.

The Satsang has obviously not come into being to meet the needs of a new professional or commercial class in Gujarat, as have various secular associations. Nevertheless it does provide a communion in which the members of the rural-based professional and commercial classes can meet and share a commitment that transcends their separate caste ties. This communion does not contradict the values of caste, and, indeed, to the extent that it raises them to a higher power, membership confers additional prestige. From this point of view we can understand that the carpenter of Sundarana can find in the Satsang an arena within which he can make a social advance, meet with influential men, and enjoy their patronage as much as their edifying conversation.

Although the teachings of Swāmi Narāyan were not directed against caste, the theological exclusiveness which is, I believe, a distinctive feature of his doctrine does, other circumstances favouring, tend to reduce the importance of caste in the eyes of his followers; obedience to caste regulations is contingent upon the authority of the Satsang. Just as a visit to Vadtāl at the full moon has replaced a visit to older sacred centres, so *darshan* of the *guru*, and his blessing are, undoubtedly, of more importance than the Brahman's rituals. Although necessary to a man living in the world, the services

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of the Brahman have been, as it were, secularized. Swāmidās would very naturally have one of his daughters married by a Brahman who served his family, but for him the real marriage would be the blessing of the couple by his *guru*. Apart from marriage, which for a Patidar is the only ceremony at which a Brahman is essential, Swāmidās would call in his *guru* for all those family occasions and celebrations to which another householder, who could afford it, would normally invite a Brahman. The extent to which the demotion of the Brahman, if I may put it that way, has taken place varies from person to person according to wealth and the degree of devotion: among the villagers the tendency is marked, and for the town dwellers it is complete.

I was not surprised when I returned to Sundarana, after an absence of three years, to find that, whereas during my earlier stay I had heard nothing of *gurus* or sectarian allegiances in the village, now many families from both the Patidar and Bareia castes affirmed an allegiance to a *guru* resident in Dakor. This man, a Vaishnavite ascetic who had settled in that holy town, had, in the customary way, gradually built up a following. This following showed signs of developing the more formal appearances of a sect in that the *guru* gave his disciples *diksha*, and invested them with his *kanthi*. Given what we know of Kishor's views on the sect of Swāmi Narāyan, views which as a voluble and influential man he had no doubt propagated, it may seem obvious that, when the villagers of Sundarana, led by the Patidar, sought sectarian respectability, they should not have turned to the Satsang. The direction of their choice has, I believe, a more general significance.[16]

We pick up again one of the underlying themes in the discussion of *najar*: inequality within equality.

Much the same changes, albeit at slower rate, as have occurred in wealthier villages are making themselves felt in Sundarana. They are largely a product of those changes, for the wealthier villages were not only traditionally the models

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for respectable and emulable customs, but also the bastions of politico-economic power. The Patidar of Sundarana preserve their prestige in the eyes of their inferiors by enjoying the, admittedly qualified, regard of their superior caste fellows. This they could not earn unless they were ready to abandon, however slowly, the customs which these superiors had themselves abandoned.

Traditionally the political and economical power of the Sundarana Patidar over inferior castes was the shadow of the more effective power of wealthier caste fellows. The ancestors of Swāmidās had an almost absolute power over their dependants, and we must remember that among these dependants are to be numbered the ancestors of Kishor and his kin.

New laws, new land regulations, new economic openings for the lower caste, however limited, inhibit Swāmidās and his kind from the baronial exploitation in which his forebears indulged. The continuing prestige of this aristocracy is considerable but it is still only a shadow of the past. Kishor and the Patidar of Sundarana live in the shadow of that shadow.

They cannot hope to realize in material terms the theoretical equality that they share with their wealthy caste fellows. As the standards of these latter relate less and less to caste customs and to purity, and more to the ideals promulgated by sect, the theoretical union of all Patidar is weakened. Swāmidās, for example, is likely to judge Kishor not so much by the dietary habits of his family or the quality of the marriages which it has contracted as by the exclusive standards of his own sect—Kishor is not a Satsangi, the carpenter is.

How could Kishor and his kin join the Satsang? Membership, so far from being a balm, could only be an irritant. Their material condition would be unchanged and they would be more likely than before to share an invidious equality with the carpenters of this world. They would have exchanged one

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kind of theoretical equality for another, but one which would deprive them of even the shadows of status.

It is, then, understandable that if sectarian adherence is the respectable mode of behaviour, the Patidar of Sundarana should hive off on their own to an allegiance which they share only, or for the most part, with their traditional inferiors in the village. They can still take pride in this allegiance over against the followers of Swāmi Narāyan, and, at least temporarily, find reassurance of their status. They have found a new inequality within equality, but one in which *they* are now the superiors.

It would be entirely misleading if this formulation were to suggest that reassertion of a relative superiority is all that has occurred. The change has much greater significance. The implication is that the ladder of emulation, which enabled us to see the Patidar caste as a unity, is breaking. The Patidar of Sundarana are now more concerned to establish themselves as a separate section with their associated inferior castes, rather than continue to emulate their caste fellows. Indeed, these latter have moved into an area of activity where Kishor and his kinsmen cannot follow without losing status. It would seem then that the breakdown of the various interdependencies between castes are followed, in this case, by a breakdown of the more subtle interdependencies within a caste.

NOTES

1. For an account of the life and teaching of Swāmi Narāyan, see Bhai Manilal C. Parekh, *Sri Swami Narayana, a gospel of Bahgwat-Dharma or God in Redemptive Action*, Rajkot, 1936.
2. Ibid. p. 211.
3. Ibid. pp. 55–61.
4. Ghurye, op. cit., pp. 122–3.
5. Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, 1824 to 1825*, London, 1828.

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6. Ibid., see entry for 23 March 1825.
7. M. S. Commissariat, *Mandelslo's Travels in Western India* (A.D. 1638–9), Calcutta, 1931, p. 19.
8. Bhai Manilal Parekh, op. cit., 1936, p. 299.
9. *Satsangijivanam*, Vol. 2, pp. 355–61, composed by Shatānandmuni, printed and published from the temple of Vadtal on the order of Ānandprasādmahārājashri, Bombay, Samvat 1992, A.D. 1936. This is a compilation of nearly 17,000 verses in five volumes; the longest work composed under the direct supervision of Sahajananda, it lays down in detail the organization and duties of the fellowship. Sir John Malcolm is not mentioned by name in the original.
10. Bhandarkar, op. cit., pp. 80–1.
11. Bhai Manilal C. Parekh, op. cit., 1937, Chap. XIX, places great emphasis upon this belief which began even in the lifetime of Sahajanda. Parekh insists upon the uniqueness of the belief among the sects in India and rejects the apparent similarity with Christianity.
12. For a complete translation see Bhai Manilal Parekh, 1936, Appendix I.
13. The initiation is simple but worth a note. The novice offers water near the feet of the *acharya* and repeats the dedication: 'To Swāminarāyan I give my mind and wealth and the sins of [previous] births'—*man, dhan ane janamnā pāp*. The traditional phrase implying total dedication and one certainly used in the Pushti Marga is *tan-man-dhan*—body, mind and wealth. *Tan* means not only body but also offspring and its omission from the Satsangi formula is significant in the light of the Maharaja Libel Case.
14. See note 33.
15. Choto, for example, inherited from his father a master-servant relationship with an Untouchable family. Although he was in no economic position to maintain them these Untouchables would occasionally come out to his bit of field and help out. I have seen him sit on a day bed out in fields while the old Untouchable woman sat on the ground before him. He would throw her a *bidi* to smoke rather than suffer the contamination transmitted by passing it: despite all this she would advise and berate him about his family affairs and private life, as befitted an old woman who knew more and better than he.
16. The movement has produced a substantial body of literature. H. T. Dave, *Shree Swaminarayan*, Bochasan and Bombay, 1967, gives an account in English of the Swami's life and teaching as received by the movement. I take this opportunity to thank Shri Praful Patel for lending me his copy autographed by the present Guruji.

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7

The Contempory Need—*Guruji*

The substitution of the fellowship of sect for that of caste has more far-reaching implications. For all that caste differences and status are preserved within the sect, these are now defined by and confined within a theology which remains, despite all accommodations, egalitarian in spirit. As the wealthy Patidar withdraw more and more from the day-to-day actualities of caste ties, and as these ties progressively weaken in the poorer sections of the caste, this latent potentiality for equality is increasingly realized.

I find support for this proposition in the history of the Satsang. It is, from my point of view, striking that the extension of the sect beyond Gujarat into East Africa, Fiji, and Great Britain, not to mention the cities of India, is not the achievement of the orthodox but of the schismatic movement.

How can we account for this? The original well-ordered sect, with the efficient teaching orders, its literature and evolving theology, seems ideally suited for missionary activity. In part we must attribute what amounts to a lethargy in these matters to a growing preoccupation, accompanied by investment, with the embellishment of the sect. Each village where the sect has substantial representation vies with others in the creation of its own temples. Although missionary activity was not and is not lacking, the Satsangis, more than other sectarians, have been keen to propagate their faith; but the activity was local and directed to the conversion of exist-

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ing relationships with caste fellows, affines and business associates, rather than to the creation of entirely new ones.

The difference between the orthodox and schismatic movements may initially be characterized by their appeal to two generations, because the younger represents in many ways the styles and problems of the modern city dweller and the emigré.

Well-to-do farmers have worn the *dhoti* all their lives, have visited Baroda, Ahmedabad and Bombay for business purposes, dealt with Japanese, British and American exporting firms and, with all their fluency in the *mechanics* of the Western world, preserved their cultural orthodoxy without taint. Their children have grown up in a different world, a world of cafés, cinemas and discotheques. Their clothes are not the pale imitations of Western modes derived from the memories of a cantonment tailor, but mass-produced, modern fashions imported from the West: they are altogether more familiar than their fathers with the variety and potentialities of modern India.

This generation does not live compassed about with a cloud of witnesses in the village, and needs more than the memory of maternal training to justify to itself the maintenance of a distinctive mode of life. The ethical problems which it faces are, moreover, those of a world with which its parents are conversant but not intimate. The preoccupation of the orthodox with the conversion of their traditional world has, perhaps, led to the neglect of this new generation. A schismatic movement now speaks to the young men and the men of the new professional classes.

What is the significance of this movement and how did it arise? Swāmi Narāyan organized his sect with foresight and efficiency. On one point he departed from traditional practice in that, unlike his own *guru*, Rāmananda, he chose first to split his secular from his spiritual authority, and second to diffuse the latter through the teaching order. According to the orthodox history, and from now onwards I shall have to

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use this distinction, he did not appoint a particular spiritual inheritor. To this extent his doctrines, organization and rituals were invested with the godhead attributed to him: while the success and stability of the Satsang derives in great part from this fact, it was at the cost of flexibility beyond a certain degree.

The authority and importance of individual guidance is, no doubt, strong. The *guru* is venerated because he is regarded as having proceeded those few steps further towards realization than his disciple. Enlightened and holy he may be, but he is still mortal. He cannot claim revelatory powers superior to those of the historical Sahājananda nor receive worship which might equate him with the divine Swāmi Narāyan. The original movement has slowed down and to a great extent it has crystallized into a Church.

The schismatics derive their history from one of the original *sādgaru* (above, p. 144), known in the literature as Gunatitananda Swāmi, the appointed head of the temple at Junagadh in Saurasthra. He is identified with one who, before his initiation as a *sannyāsi*, was known as Mulji Sharma. This Mulji Sharma is also named in the literature of the orthodox as one of the early disciples of Swāmi Rāmananda. Mulji Sharma was one of the Swāmi's following when Sahājananda, then Nilkanth, first appeared among them. His significance may be seen in the following, taken from a pamphlet published in English from the schismatic temple at Bochasan in the Kaira District.

> Shree Ramanand Swami introduces to Lord Swaminarayan, Moolji [*sic*] Sharma, one of his disciples. Seeing him, Swaminarayan says, 'This Moolji Sharma is the embodiment incarnate of Akshar Brahman—my Eternal Abode. He has the fullest realization of my full-fledged Divine form. With this realized knowledge of my Divine form, he is constantly attached to me. He will spread this knowledge among my disciples and this knowledge alone

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of my Divine form, will redeem the souls from the sorrows of life and will transform them to Brahmic state.[1]

The theology here is very complicated. Akshar Brahman is not a place concept like 'heaven', it is a form of Brahman. We need not be concerned with these intricacies, for the essential claim being made here, and it has no parallel in the literature of the orthodox, is that there was a *divine union, a sharing of divinity*, between the man who was to be called Gunatitananda Swāmi and Sahājananda, Swāmi Narāyan. This belief in shared and transmitted divinity has been passed on through four generations of *guru* up to the present time. The document from which I have quoted the story goes on:

> Thus a spiritual legacy was established for the continuous manifestation of the Lord, [continued through such perfectly developed Brahmic personalities] for the redemption of souls.[2]

It is a doctrine, basic to the schismatic teaching, that liberation is achieved by serving the living presence of Brahma which is available in the person of *guruji*, as he is respectfully known.

The difference between the orthodox and the schismatic is comparable with that between the Sunni and Shia muslims. On the one hand we have a learned tradition derived from the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions, and on the other a movement represented in several sects, each one of which has, at any given time, some kind of inherited divine leadership. The orthodox sect of Swāmi Narāyan leaves room, as we have seen, for what is commonly called '*guru*-worship', but this is controlled by and subordinate to the received traditional doctrine. It was precisely because the third spiritual successor of Gunatitananda Swāmi, Swāmi Yagnapurushdāsji, tried to install an image of Gunantitananda for temple worship that he was obliged

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to leave the body of the orthodox. It was in his lifetime and afterwards that the schismatics began to establish their own temples.

The schismatics cope with the doubts and difficulties which professional and commercial men are likely to meet in their day-to-day affairs, and in their intercourse with men of very different faiths and ideologies. To the extent that they explicitly and carefully cater for such men they are likely to attract those who have received a largely Western education but wish, at the same time, to preserve a distinctively Indian shape to their lives.

We may imagine a doctor or a lawyer living in Baroda or Ahmedabad, perhaps the third or more generation of city dwellers: what does caste mean to him? He probably calls a barber to his house when he needs a haircut and no doubt the man will be of the Barber caste; but the reason why *he* is called, rather than another, is likely to be that his shop is nearby. Our professional man will send his clothes to a laundry managed, most likely, by a man of the Washerman caste who employs such labour as he can get regardless of caste. Untouchability as represented by particular members of a particular caste will mean little and certainly the scavenging function has been abolished by the water-closet. It is possible that, if his family has been settled in the city for a long time, it may have developed a relationship with a particular Brahman family; but it is equally likely that should our doctor or lawyer wish to marry his daughter he may employ any Brahman whose appearance and manners have commended themselves. In short, the specialization of labour according to pure and impure occupations, the hierarchy of caste and the discrimination that goes therewith, have little basis in modern city life. All that remains is caste endogamy, and even that is crumbling among the younger generation of the educated classes.

Such men can find in the new teaching, as also in other sects, a continuity with the faith of their fathers, and a

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communion which they can still share with others who more rigidly adhere to the world of caste in the villages.

The orthodox Satsang, synthesizing as it does the values imparted and supported by the village community with the individualistic faith based on *bhakti*, admirably meets the needs of a changing rural society. This synthesis cannot support the modern city dweller and the emigrant, for whom much of the village culture embodied in sectarian practice is meaningless. The schismatic movement, by putting a new emphasis upon *bhakti* and obedience to the *guru*, gives courage to the individual conscience relatively deprived of social support in a situation of continuous change.

Instead of a temple and an image of stone the schismatic movement provides a temple of living flesh in the person of *guruji*, who by virtue of his spiritual succession has authority of revelation and the capacity to preserve flexibility in doctrine and practice.

What we have observed is another variation of the old conflict between priest and prophet. On the one hand we have increasing concern for organization, the insistence on continuity and perpetuation: on the other, an emphasis upon the individual, upon growth, change, and renewal of revelation. In the history of India we witness the final trial of the *sannyāsi*, who has through the centuries fled from the world and been seduced back into it: he suffered modification and corruption by its demands, but preserved and refined, in solitude and in alienation, a language for the loneliness of the permanent emigré, the modern city dweller.

NOTES

1. H. T. Dave, *Brahman Darsham*, Bochasan and Bombay, undated, p. 2.
2. Ibid, p. 6.

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APPENDIX 1
Morality and Non-violence

Many anthropological accounts, especially those which concern belief, stretch the students' credulity to breaking point. However intricate the conceptual system of a given society, the belief of the people concerned is all too often represented as a simple, well-articulated faith. To the extent that no room is allowed for scepticism, doubt, and adjustment, the reader must have difficulty in identifying as human these creatures who seem too good to be true.

Let me give an example: we are told that a peasant woman in India should not attend an auspicious ceremony, such as a marriage, while she is menstruating, and she can only purify herself over a period of days. In some areas, and in some castes, she may speed up the purification by pouring water over herself with a sieve. Because the mesh breaks the water into so many streams, these become the equivalent of so many baths; the woman can purify herself instantaneously and so attend the marriage.

There are two typical reactions to this practice found both among sophisticated city dwellers in India and Western scholars. On the one hand it may be regarded as an amusing superstition, and on the other it may be described as a Pharisaism amounting to hypocrisy. Both these reactions impute a kind of simple-mindedness to the peasant in that the first is of the order, 'these people *really* believe etc.', while the second imputes an essential disbelief in that, it is

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supposed, the peasant is ready to drop any observance when it does not suit his personal convenience. It is these reactions, rather, that are simple-minded because they limit the range of human possibility to total acceptance or total rejection.

I dare to say that no one who accepted either of these alternative views of a peasant woman's behaviour would be content to have his own behaviour so simplified. If I am correct we then confront a problem: why do we allow assumptions about human nature which do not govern our own relationships to creep into our descriptions of others? I approach this as a technical problem for social anthropologists, rather than as the moral problem which it undoubtedly is also.

Let me point towards an ideal alternative with the following:

> The religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable: it was necessary to be baptised, else one could not be buried in the churchyard, and to take the sacrament before death as a security against more dimly understood peril; but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well cured hams at one's funeral, and to leave an unimpeachable will. . . . A conspicuous quality in the Dodson character was its genuineness: its vices and virtues alike were phases of a proud, honest egoism, which had a hearty dislike to whatever made against its own credit and interest, and would be frankly hard of speech to inconvenient 'kin', but would never forsake or ignore them—would not let them want bread but only require them to eat it with bitter herbs.

Despite the differences of time and culture, this account of an early nineteenth-century, middle-class family, living in a provincial town not yet cut off from its agricultural context, describes perfectly the psychology of many respectable Patidar families in Gujarat today; the chapter from which it

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is taken is full of echoes. It is a realistic account of a life which the author herself contrasts with a more romantic view.

> It is a sordid life, you say, this of the Tullivers and Dodsons —irradiated by no sublime principles, no romantic visions, no active, self-renouncing faith—moved by none of those wild, uncontrollable pasions which create the dark shadows of misery and crime—without that primitive rough simplicity of want, that hard, submissive, ill-paid toil, that childlike spelling-out of what nature has written, which gives its poetry to peasant life.

Although anthropologists today are not overtly prone to romanticism of quite this order, they have still to develop a language which could save them from a not dissimilar kind of simplification.

I say 'language' because I do not believe that the social anthropologist, as a person, could possibly lack the necessary sensibility: he could scarcely survive in the field if he did so. But what seems to happen, when it comes to writing up one's material, is that the procedures of the disciplines seem to demand a falsification: each general proposition in the formal account is contradicted by a host of memories of individuals who did *not* believe this, or behave like that.

To set out a mass of anecdotes, which by their very specificity would atomize the whole, is no satisfactory solution. Nor do I suggest that the social anthropologist must at least approach the qualities of one of our greatest novelists if he is to pursue his vocation. What I do suggest is that, as increasingly we free ourselves of misconceptions about scientific procedure, we might widen the range of those from whom we hope to learn. Where an analytic intelligence is combined with a sociological sensibility, as pre-eminently in the work of George Eliot, we can perhaps learn to deepen our own analyses without, for all that, pretending to creative art of the same order.

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These considerations only voice a frustration and a hope. In this appendix I do not aim at any such analytic advance; rather, for the lack of it, I attempt to correct one major simplification which distorts not only the Westerner's view of rural India, but also the views of Indian citizens.

The simplification is of the complex which embraces vegetarianism, *ahinsa*—non-violence, and the veneration of the cow.

The Patidar subscribe to the values which make up this complex. This proposition means that other castes ascribe to the Patidar behaviour appropriate to these values and treat them, accordingly, as a relatively high caste. Conformably, no Patidar of the countryside would deny that these values are his and that he should observe them. Who, after all, in our own society would disclaim general probity?

Let us consider first the veneration of the cow which is associated with the buffalō and, to a lesser degree, the *nilgai,* a kind of deer which still roams wild in parts of Gujarat. It is a notorious fact that there is a 'cow problem' in modern India. The Patidar who use bullocks for ploughing and draught, and water buffalo for milk, have no 'problems' with either. The caste hierarchy corresponds to local economic gradations; when a wealthy Patidar finds that his bullock or buffalo is ceasing to be economic, he sells it to a poorer caste fellow, or to a man of lower caste. By this process the beast descends the hierarchy from owner to owner. The speed of its descent is determined by the rate of its physical deterioration. Finally it finds itself among those who are not lacking in scruples but who are not, for all that, scrupulous: 'Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive officiously to keep alive' sums up the morality which now determines the animal's fate. Whether it dies by natural means or is assisted by medicine, its carcass finishes up with the Untouchable cobbler who will make sandals or shoes from its skin which may well be worn in the family of the original owner.

In a small community these stages in the life of a beast

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are likely to be well known. I have reported the whole process as it was given to me by an informant. However, the farmer who first sets the animal off on its downward path does not feel guilty of 'cow slaughter'. An Englishman who enjoys cheap poultry and eggs neither accepts responsibility for battery farming nor eschews his disapproval of it.

Nilgai are not as numerous as they were, but even a small herd of half a dozen can do a great deal of damage to a standing crop. Monkeys are an even greater menace, for they pull up the growing tobacco plants for sport, and destroy the year's crop in a night. Two such predators, the one cousin to the cow and the other descendant of Hanumān, the monkey god, still constitute a formidable problem for a peasantry dedicated to the proposition that even insect life is sacred.

The *nilgai* is a rare visitor today when it can find little wild protective cover. When a herd is sighted, or known to be in the vicinity, messages are sent to Bhil or Vaghari huntsmen who, with gunshot or poison, eliminate the menace.

Monkeys are a chronic nuisance infesting the trees of every village. The only safeguard is to employ a youth as watchman; with a sling and clods of earth he can chase off a troop before it settles. Such is the theory which, if put into practice, would be a great waste of time and effort. In fact certain young men, Choto among them, develop particular skill with the sling and, as he put it to me, one can never be sure that there is not a stone concealed in a clod of earth. There is some point in killing at least one of the monkeys for these creatures do seem to be reluctant to return to a field where one of their number has been killed.

What can we make of this situation? Choto is poor and looked down upon, not only on that account but also because of the various misdoings which he is the first to proclaim. He has little to hope for and chooses the devil's reputation as his particular expression of despair. No landowner would employ him to murder monkeys: all are impressed with his abilities as a watchman. Stones are not so common in that

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alluvial soil as to make the sling a too obviously lethal weapon.

One final example concerns a snake. In an early discussion with Kishor I had specifically pressed him with the hypothetical example of a snake falling on to a bed on which his youngest son, at that time Vinod, was lying. I received the reply that I deserved: under no circumstances would one kill a snake, it was *pāp*, a sin, and one must have faith, *vishvās*.

Some months later a situation similar to my hypothetical one occurred in the porch of Kishor's house. One of the boys reported a snake in the rafters. Hāthi, the sole possessor of a shotgun in the village, was called and the snake was summarily blasted out of its nook. Later, Kishor gave a coconut to Bhattiji.

Once again, it would be absurd to speak of hypocrisy. For Kishor the taking of life was a sin he would, in favouring circumstances, avoid: it is the occupation of saints to strive harder. The killing of the snake was a sin, and the offering to Bhattiji an atonement. Kishor would wait to see whether it was sufficient: if within a few months he, or some member of his family, were bitten by a scorpion, or even suffered some less directly related misfortune, it would be evidence that a heavier compensation was being demanded.

To the town-dweller the avoidance of violence is a simple matter. Monkeys are certainly a nuisance, but one against which precautions can be taken. At worst they may ruin a garden, but they cannot destroy a livelihood. In the early monsoon a snake may take refuge in the house, but this is a rare occurrence. In short the observation of *ahinsa* presents few problems in the towns or cities and it is questionable, therefore, whether its dictates can properly be said to belong in the field of morality at all. Are our observances virtuous, or merely conventional, when there is nothing that induces us to alternative courses?

Attitudes towards meat eating are interestingly different. Vegetarianism is derived from Vaishnavite teachings, and in

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part it is imposed by agricultural life. For the old Rajput landlords meat, but never beef, was permitted; in effect such meat as they ate would have been the product of the chase. Even for those lower castes which were not touched by Vaishnavism, before the advent of Swāmi Narāyan, meat would have been a rare delicacy. The land was increasingly and intensively cultivated to produce the staple crops of millet, and to a certain extent wheat; little was left wild for game. For similar reasons fresh vegetables are still a delicacy for the majority today. No land is afforded for them in the village, and they form no part of the diet of lower castes.

Conceivably because meat was, and still is, the permitted food of Rajputs, a warrior and regal caste, the attitude towards it of even strict vegetarians is equivocal. Readers of Gandhi's autobiography will recall his youthful belief, shared by his contemporaries, that the British owed their strength and political dominance to meat eating. The belief survives in Sundarana.

I bought a bottle of a well-known general tonic for Vinod which appeared to do him good, so much so that Surajben asked me to get another bottle next time I was in town. For all that, I heard from Momad that she was convinced that the efficacy of the tonic was to be attributed to some essence of meat in its content. I assured her, truthfully, that it contained no meat, but she responded with a polite smile, indicating that she was no fool and did not need my reassuring lies. Deeper than the historical example of the Rajputs is, then, this ambivalence hidden in the expression of caste values. The pure is vegetarian, non-violent and superior, the impure non-vegetarian, violent and inferior. Purity finds its ultimate expression in *brahmachārya*, chastity; impurity is associated with genital sexuality. This accords with the belief that the semen, if stored in the body, can be converted into intellectual and spiritual power. It accords also with the villagers' opinion that Untouchable women, although in fact

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racially indistinguishable, are both more attractive and sexually vigorous than women of higher castes.

The ultimate physical sources of impurity are the activities and excretions common to humanity: birth, menstruation, death, copulation and defecation, blood, sweat and the growth of nails and hair. Village beliefs and morality support a hierarchy which leads away from impure nature while simultaneously accommodating it in a variety of ways. Sin and impurity result from the exigencies of life, they happen to men as inevitably as monkeys attack a tobacco field. The day-to-day morality of the villagers, their pragmatic adaptation of belief to the exigencies of life is in harmony with the symbiotic relation of the pure and the impure. Beliefs about impurity and about violence are not introjected to become matters of choice for an inevitably 'guilty' conscience.

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APPENDIX 2

Selections from the *Shikshāpatri* of Swāmi Narāyan

The original book of precepts was written by Swāmi Narāyan in 1830. It is composed of two hundred and twelve tightly packed Sanskrit couplets. It would be very difficult indeed to make a representative selection from so dense a work. What I hope to do here is to give something of the flavour of the thing.

v. 7. Let us all bear in mind the contents of this Shikshapatri with a fixed state of mind as they are productive of good to all living beings.

vv. 11–12. No follower of mine shall ever knowingly kill any creature of any sort . . . my disciples shall never kill any animal . . . for the purpose of offering a sacrifice to the gods . . . for it is declared that *ahinsa* is the highest of all religious duties.

v. 14. Let none ever commit suicide whether through rage, or in any place of pilgrimage . . .

v. 15. Flesh shall never be taken, even though it be the remains of a sacrifice, nor alcohol ever be drunk, not even that which has been offered to the gods.

v. 18. No followers of mine, men or women, shall ever commit adultery, they shall shun gambling and other such vices . . .

v. 19. Nor shall anyone eat or drink from a person of a lower caste, except in Jaganathpuri, even though such things may be the remnants of offerings to Shri Krishna.

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v. 23. If any of my followers pass by a temple of Shiva, or other god, he shall bow down respectfully, enter and pay his respects to the image.

v. 24. None shall give up the performances of the duties imposed upon his class or religious order, nor shall he adopt the duties of others . . .

v. 26. You shall not tell such truth as is productive of mischief to yourself or to others . . .

v. 32. Never allow bodily excretions or evacuations or saliva to fall in places protected by the scriptures or public custom from such nuisance.

v. 34. Males shall not listen to discourses on religious matters from the mouths of women . . .

v. 36. Never do any act rashly, neither be slow in religious duties. Impart to others the knowledge you receive, and associate with men of holy living.

v. 39. The worship of Krishna must not be performed without attending to one's secular duties, nor should one give up the worship of Krishna for fear of the calumny of the ignorant.

v. 40. Whether on holy days or ordinary days, men and women in the temples shall avoid touching each other.

v. 48. My followers shall not have resort lightly to the law enjoined for circumstances of extreme distress.

v. 62. Only those images which have been given by the Acharya, or consecrated by him shall be worshipped and given divine service. To other images it is sufficient to make an obeisance.

v. 67. Let everyone always provide his servants with food and clothing in proportion both to their merit and his own means.

v. 68. In conversation every person should be addressed conformably to his position and suitably as to the time and place . . .

vv. 81–82. The fasts and festivals appointed by that king

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among Vaishnavas, Shri Vithalanathji, son of Shri Vallabhacharya, shall be observed as he ordained, as shall be the service prescribed by him for the Lord Krishna.

v. 105. The individual soul dwells in the heart, subtle as an atom. It is Consciousness and Knowledge. It pervades the entire body, and is invulnerable, and indivisible.

v. 106. The world of *maya* is the *shakti* of God: it is known by three qualities—it is darkness, it produces in the soul ideas of the body and bodily matters, it gives birth to notions such as I and mine.

v. 107. That which abides in the heart and pervades the life, ever watchful and independent, which gives the fruit of actions, that is the Lord.

v. 115. Krishna, his incarnations and the images of those incarnations are suitable for meditation. Living men, other gods, and even those who are knowers of Brahman must not be meditated upon.

vv. 135–136. My male followers who are householders shall not touch widows other than close relations, nor shall they remain alone in a private place with a young mother, sister or daughter except in time of distress.

v. 147. My followers shall give a tithe of grain or money acquired by their exertions to Krishna, to the poor they should give a twentieth part.

v. 152. My followers shall pay the wages agreed to workmen and not keep secret the payment of debts, nor shall they keep secret transactions at the time of marriage.

v. 154. When they are oppressed by governments my followers shall leave even their own native country to emigrate to another and live there in peace.

v. 208. My followers shall read this Shikshapatri daily, or hear others read it.

v. 209. Even if it is not possible to read it, it should be worshipped each day and honoured with the highest reverence as my word and my representative.

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v. 212. And may he who destroys the afflictions of the faithful, and preserves the devout observers of *dharma*, who gives happiness to his devotees, may that Lord Krishna grant us all his blessings.

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Glossary

In order to avoid distracting the reader I have avoided using diacritical marks in the text except where their pronunciation without such guidance would sound absurd. In this glossary I have given a more careful transliteration for the benefit of anyone who may wish to follow up any particular subject. I have not distinguished the long and the short *i* and *u*: these are often interchangeable in Gujarati.

Some readers may be puzzled by my rendering of *a* in Gujarati words occurring in the text and in the glossary. This results from my concern in the text for a reasonable pronunciation. The name of God, *Nārāyan*, is pronounced with a heavier emphasis on the second *a*; this is reflected in my rendering in the text. The Gujarati short *a* also receives different emphases; although, for example, *kuḷadevi* is the correct transliteration, the *a* tends to be lost in spoken Gujarati. The same vowel, however, in the word *mahādev*, tends to receive a spoken emphasis almost equivalent to the long *ā* which follows it. In general, where *a* occurs without a stress it should be pronounced as the initial vowel in 'again'.

āchārya—a revered preceptor in spiritual matters. Sometimes the word is limited strictly to philosophers who have expounded their own doctrine. The term is not interchangeable with *guru* and connotes much higher authority and prestige.

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āchāryābhimānayoga—total dependence upon the *āchārya* not only for instruction but also upon his merits.

advaita—lit. non-duality; *advaitavād*, the doctrine that the individual and the supreme souls are one.

akṣar—letter of the alphabet, written or spoken; destiny; Brahma; the permanent, indestructible abode of Brahma.

ārati—the act of offering incense to an image, particularly the evening offering.

Ārya Samāj—founded by Dayananda Sarasvati, born in Gujarat, 1824, died, of poison it is said, at Ajmere, 1883. His teaching based on the inspired truth of the Vedas had no room for caste. Dayananda was basically a reformist in the sense that much Western theological and social thought was given Vedic sanction in his doctrine. A significant and little known fact is that the first English biography of Dayananda was instigated by Sidney Webb who wrote a preface for it (see Lajput Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, London, 1915).

ātma—the soul or, as first part of a compound, the self—e.g. *ātmaghāt*, suicide.

avatār: an incarnation of the divine; see note 4, p. 80.

avyaktachāra: without settled progress and hence way of life.

avyakaliṅga—without external signs. The component *liṅga* here means simply 'sign'; see *liṅga*, the male symbol.

bagbhagat—a hypocrite, one whose piety is suspect.

bakarākṣas—*baka* was a bird (crane?)-shaped spirit of vanity and cunning destroyed by Krishna. A *rākṣas* is a malevolent demon. The composite term means the ghost of a Brahman which is thought to be particularly powerful.

Bāṇiā, var. *Vāṇia*—the traditional trading, commercial caste of Gujarat.

Bāreia—a low caste claiming Rājput affiliations; in the area of this study the Bāreia are landless and work for the Patidar.

bhagat—a pious man.

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bhagavān: the commonest name, in this area, for divinity whether specified or not. Very commonly used in profane expletive as 'God' or 'Lord' are used in English.

bhāi—lit. brother; as a suffix to a proper name it connotes respect, and in common usage it is the equivalent of the English 'Mr.'.

bhajan—lit. an act of adoration, a hymn.

bhakta—a devotee.

bhakti—devotion, worship.

bhaṅgi—the scavenging caste whose duties involve the clearing of night-soil and the removal of dead carcasses; the lowest of the untouchable castes.

Bhāṭia—a trading caste located for the most part in Kutch. They were probably the first to establish a trading connexion with the Persian Gulf and with East Africa, from which they derived considerable profit.

bhut—ghost, also demon, *bhutaḍi* (dim.), a female ghost.

bhuvo—the particular devotee of a *mātā* who is possessed by her.

brahmachāri—one who is observing the rules of the first stage of life, *brahmchārya*, a period of study and celibacy. In the writings of Gandhi the latter term becomes synonymous with sexual abstinence.

chuḍel—a female ghost, usually that of a barren woman.

darshan—a seeing; of a god, a holy man or any great personage.

deri—(also *daheri*), a small domed shrine or temple.

dhan—see *tan*.

dharamshāḷā—a lodging for pilgrims or travellers, erected as an act of piety.

dikṣa—precept, initiation, the secret saying given at initiation.

gādi—a dais or throne. From such, preachers might address their congregation and hence the term is extended to refer to the town or city where a religious leader has his seat.

Gosaiṅ—the term is used sometimes for a caste of inferior

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pujāri who serve the temples of Shiva; sometimes the term is reserved to a Shivaite ascetic.

gvāla—one of the daily rituals in the Vaishnavite temples. Krishna is thought of as tending his cattle.

haveli (from the Arabic)—a large house or mansion. The term used for their main temple by the Pushti Marga.

hiṅsa—lit. killing and hence violence. Gandhi developed the moral connotations of this term and extended its negative, *ahinsa*—not killing, to cover a wide range of charitable virtues.

homa—a fire sacrifice.

jajmān—lit. he for whom the sacrifice is performed, the patron of the Brahman; by extension any patron.

janoi—the sacred thread, the outward sign of the twice-born. Normally invested about the time of puberty for males only.

japa—muttering, a prayer made by repetition of a sacred verse or name.

japjapavuṅ—to pass one's time in idleness.

kachcha—food cooked in water or oil which may not be received from a lower caste from whom *pakka* (q.v.) foods might be accepted. The term is extended to mud, as opposed to brick houses, country lanes, and almost anything made of an inferior material where a superior version also exists.

kaṅku—red turmeric, or saffron used to make auspicious markings and hence, especially, the mark on the brow.

kaṅṭhi—a necklace, from *kaṅṭh*, throat; especially a necklace of *tuḷasi* beads worn by a Vaishnavite sectarian.

karma—literally, action. The law of *karma* is normally associated with the belief in re-birth: one's status or the events which occur in this life are the product of good or bad actions in an earlier life.

kul—lineage.

kuḷadevi—the goddess of a descent group.

kulin—a man who has a lineage, an aristocrat.

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liṅg—phallic representation of Shiva in stone; see *yoni*.

mahādev—lit. great god, a title of Shiva, so commonly used as to amount to an alternative name. Cf. Hari (= Lord) Kriṣṇa.

mahārāja—lit. great king, a common form of respectful address to Brahmans; the title of the descendants of Vallabhachārya.

mahātmā—lit. great soul, an exalted and illustrious person.

man—see *tan*.

maṅgala—the first of the daily rites in a Vaishnavite temple.

maṅtra—a sacred formula, often a divine name, or verse from a sacred text.

mārga—a road or way; a way of life, a sectarian persuasion.

mātā—with a name suffix, one of the many female goddesses of the village. Used alone the term can connote the one, undivided divinity conceived of as feminine (see *kuladevi*).

māya—the created world; illusion.

mel—filth, faeces; adj. *meluṅ*, filthy, filthy minded, devious, hence *melo mānas*, an evil man, scorcerer.

melo—from *melāvavuṅ*, to mix or mingle. A concourse of people, a fair usually at some sacred centre.

mokṣa—liberation from rebirth—variously described by different schools as a state, or condition of bliss, or of non-being.

murti—image, statue, embodiment; see *svārupa*.

najar—a glimpse or view which, when accompanied by envy, we translate as the evil-eye. Hence *najariuṅ*—a black spot on the face, or a charm to avert the evil eye. The word *najar* appears to be derived from Arabic.

Nārāyan—a name of Vishnu.

pakka—ripe, well cooked, or made, durable. The term is used of macadamized roads and brick houses as opposed to *kachcha*, q.v. It is also used of pure foods cooked with the products of the cow, milk or *ghi*, as opposed to those cooked in water or oil.

paramahaṅsa—the highest order of asceticism; one who has subdued all his senses and achieved complete detachment.

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Paṭaṇwāḍia—a low caste similar to the Bāreia, q.v.

Pāṭidār—agriculturists, the dominant caste of central Gujarat.

prapatti—helpless reliance upon God.

prasād—lit. favour, grace; food distributed after it has been offered to god.

pujāri—the one who offers worship, *pujā*; the officiant in a temple.

punam—the day of the full moon, the last day of the bright half of the month. A bogus folk-etymology derives it from *puṇya*—spiritual merit.

puṣṭi—nourishment, strengthening, divine graces, hence *puṣṭimārga*—the way of grace.

rājabhog—lit. a king's enjoyment, feast; the main rite in a Vaishnavite temple.

Rajput—a warrior, kingly caste, formerly dominant in central Gujarat.

Rāval—a very low but not untouchable caste; traditional occupation, playing drums; associated with spirit possession.

sādhu—a holy ascetic, or any good man of holy and virtuous life. Sometimes, but wrongly, used interchangeably with *saṅnyāsi*, q.v.

sàndhya—an evening ritual in a Vaishnavite temple; Krishna is conceived to be returning from the pasture.

saṅnyās—renunciation, the fourth stage of life; *saṅnyāsi*, one who has been initiated into the life of renunciation.

sati—a chaste and virtuous wife and, by extension one who burns herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

satsaṅg—*sat*, true and virtuous + *saṅg*, society or fellowship. The name of the sect founded by Swāmi Nārāyan.

satsaṅgi—a member of the *satsang*.

sātvik—pure, true; used of the qualities of the ideal Brahman, and also of pure vegetable offerings in sacrifice etc.

seva—service, divine service.

shakti—power, activity, the divine female expression of this.

shaktipuja—the worship of the divine *shakti*.

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shayana—the final ritual in a Vaishnavite temple when Krishna is put to bed.

Shiva—throughout India one of the most powerful male expressions of the divine.

shivnirmālya—flowers offered to Shiva, a term used for any common, worthless thing.

sringāra—the second of the daily rituals in a Vaishnavite temple, when the image is dressed for the day.

sudhāravuṅ—to improve, reform.

suraṇ—a bulbous root vegetable (*Amorphophallus campanulatus*): commonly eaten on fast-days.

svarupa—own figure or form; natural or real figure, to be distinguished in iconology from *murti*, q.v.

swāmi—lit. lord or proprietor, master. It has come in modern times to become almost exclusively a religious title.

tan—body. The Vaishnavite traditionally dedicated himself, 'tan, man ane dhan', body, mind and wealth, to the Maharajas. See note 13, p. 157.

trishul—a trident, one of the weapons of Shiva; often carried by Shivaite ascetics.

upvās—usually translated as fast, it is in fact severe abstinence from a wide range of foods.

uṭhthāpaṇa—the afternoon ritual in a Vaishnavite temple; the god is conceived of as arising from his siesta.

Vāghari—low-caste hunters and fowlers; a byword for dirtiness.

vāhan—a vehicle, the animal upon which a god or spirit is believed to ride.

vishiṣṭādvaitavād—the qualified monism of Rāmanuja, adhered to and preached by Swāmi Narāyan.

Viṣṇu—together with Shiva, one of the most powerful male expressions of the divine.

yoni—the vulva; the vulvic stone circle in which the *liṅga* is set.

zan—demon, evil spirit.

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NON-RENUNCIATION

Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture

T. N. Madan

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PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

The essays comprising this book were written over a number of years. In preparing the book, the essays, all but one of which had been published already, were subjected to different degrees of revision and rewriting. I did not eliminate entirely the overlapping of the chapters. While this resulted in some looseness of the structure, it also preserved the possibility of the book being read piecemeal, a chapter at a time. I should like to add, however, that what is offered here is a book with a unifying theme, namely, *the ideal of the life of the householder as the good life*. My interpretations of the various sub-themes will become clear to the reader only if the book is read in the sequence in which the chapters and the argument are laid out.

I have written about the theme and the sub-themes and my interpretations of them at some length in the Introduction. I will not therefore write about them here. There are two points, however, which I should clarify.

First, the word 'Hindu' in the subtitle. Strictly speaking this book *is* about the Brahmanical tradition, but it does not deny the existence of non-Brahmanical traditions in Hindu society. To the extent that each of these traditions is Hindu as well as Brahmanical or Shudra, or even non-sectarian, it may be legitimately seen as illuminating the complex multi-vocal Hindu tradition. To say that the Brahmanical element by itself does not constitute the Hindu tradition is true; but to assert that it has not been of critical importance in the making of this tradition would be obviously false.

Secondly, I would like to point out that the titles of the different chapters are not intended to signify simple-minded binary oppositions: they rather stress the fact that the idea of the 'whole' in Hindu culture is a transcendental concept which encompasses contraries but belongs to a higher level than them. There is a sense in which the contraries are complementary. Thus the ideal of householdership is to seek detachment in the midst of the joys of

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domesticity, not outside them. I trust this will become clear to the reader fairly early in his or her reading of the book.

I may mention here that the book was received well by readers and reviewers, and was reprinted a little over a year after its first publication in 1987. Subsequently, thanks to the initiative of Mr Clemens Heller, and the support of Professor Louis Dumont, *Non-Renunciation* was translated into French by two well-known anthropologists, Madame Denise Paulme-Schaeffner and Dr Bernard Juillerat. It was published in 1990 under the title of *A l'opposé du renoncement: Perplexitiés de la vie quotidienne hindoue* (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris).

It is good now to see *Non-Renunciation* reappear in an Oxford India Paperback (OIP) edition.

10 May 1995 T. N. MADAN

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Well-established conventions have been followed in rendering Sanskrit and Hindi words in Roman. Long vowels are shown thus: ā (आ) as in father, ī (ई) as in machine, ū (ऊ) as in rule.

Among consonants, attention may be drawn to the following : g (ग) as in goat, ṅ (ङ) as in ink, c (च) as in church, ñ (ञ) as in Spanish señor, ś (श) as in sugar, ṣ (ष) as in shun. Besides, there is the distinction between dental and cerebral consonants: t (त), th (थ), d (द), dh (ध), n (न), and ṭ (ट), ṭh (ठ), ḍ (ड), ḍh (ढ), ṇ (ण). S (स) as in sun is also a dental consonant. Aspirated consonants have the letter h added to them: kh (ख), gh (घ), ch (छ), jh (झ), th (थ), dh (ध), ṭh (ठ) ḍh (ढ), ph (फ), bh (भ).

The use of ṁ nasalizes the preceding vowel (as in *saṁskāra*) and ḥ indicates a preceding breathing vowel (as in *śatruḥ*).

Kashmiri words (in Chapters 1, 2 and 5) pose special problems. For simplicity and comparability, original Sanskrit words have been used whenever it has been possible to trace these from their spoken Kashmiri form.

All common nouns from Sanskrit and other Indian languages which are not to be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* have been italicized and provided with diacritical marks. Personal and place names, names of rivers and mythological figures, and the titles of traditional 'texts' have been printed in Roman without diacritical marks, which have been, however, added to them in the Index. Titles of authored texts (ancient as well as modern) have been italicized without diacritical marks, which are, again, provided in the Index.

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INTRODUCTION
INTIMATIONS OF THE GOOD LIFE

The better trained we are
The more we doubt ourselves.
KALIDASA

It is not permitted to know all things.
HORACE

And what you do not know is the only thing you know.
T. S. ELIOT

SCOPE, DATA, METHODS

Much has been written about the salience of *sannyāsa*, or renunciation, in Hindu culture. The theme of this book, however, is non-renunciation as a value. And it is a book of interpretations.

Hindu society is best known by caste, its most characteristic institution, and by renunciation, perhaps its best-known cultural ideal. The interpretation offered in this book is that, although renunciation is undoubtedly a remarkable value orientation which permeates the world-view of even the worldly householder, it does not bestow its distinctive character upon the everyday life of Hindus. Caste and renunciation are in fact antithetical though complementary[1]: while the former, based on a logic of difference and solidarity, provides a broad social framework for individual and group action in a world of social relations, the latter is its repudiation as both value and empirical condition. What is in consonance with caste is domesticity with its values of auspiciousness, purity and moral equipoise.

Renunciation has been traditionally regarded not as an arbi-

[1] Depending on one's perspective, either of these relations may be stressed. Thus, Dumont places the emphasis on complementarity: 'It may be doubted whether the caste system could have existed and endured independently of its contradictory, renunciation' (1980: 186).

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trary annulment of the life of the man-in-the-world but, and in fact ideally, as its culmination. Such a viewpoint may be derived from the Manusmriti itself, perhaps the best-known of the *dharmaśāstra* texts, which forbids men to become renouncers until they have discharged the traditional three debts (to gods, gurus and ancestors) by living the life of the householder. Kane in his monumental survey of the *dharmaśāstra* concludes that the overall tendency 'is to glorify the status of an householder and push into the background the two *āśramas* of *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*, so much so that certain works say that these are forbidden in the Kali age' (1941: 424). In fact, Kane points out, some prominent *dharmaśāstra* writers such as Gautama and Baudhayana looked upon the stage of the householder as the only stage of life (ibid.: 640).

And yet, renunciation has been considered the supreme value among the Brahmans who were the ideologues of Hindu society. Thus, it has been asserted that the social pre-eminence of the Brahman is based not on his 'monopoly of Vedic knowledge', or on his priesthood, but 'on his being the exponent of the values of renunciation' (Heesterman 1985: 44). More generally, renunciation has been called by Dumont 'a sort of universal language of India' (1970: 52), and the renouncer has been identified by him as 'the creator of values' in Indian religion and philosophy (ibid.: 46). Indeed, Dumont maintains, 'what one is in the habit of calling Indian thought is for the very great part the thought of the sannyasi' (ibid.: 12). No wonder, then, that the Hindu has been seen all over the world in the image of the sannyasi: a truly magnificent, even theatrical, figure who gives away all his possessions, performs his own mortuary rites to proclaim the severance of all human bonds, and lives a highly disciplined life of austerities—a homeless wanderer, 'an emaciated figure . . . with his begging bowl, his staff and orange dress' (ibid.: 44).

Though he may be tall and splendid, the renouncer is by no means the only actor on the Hindu stage of life. In fact he is not on the stage at all, having left it, but looks at it from the sidelines, as it were. The figure in the centre of the stage is a rather homely character, namely, the householder (*gṛhastha*). If not exactly cast in a heroic mould, he is not the 'phantom-like' man either that Dumont (1970: 48) considers him to be.

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It is the ideal of his life to 'live in the world' but to do so in the light of the renouncer's philosophy (see Dumont, 1970: 12, 41 *et passim*). Translated into the householder's idiom, renunciation becomes the twin ideals of self-possession and detachment in the midst of worldly involvements which are not considered by him evil in themselves. What he seeks to resist is being enslaved by such involvements. He hopes to mediate between total indulgence and total renunciation. It is, indeed, all a matter of relations.

This book is, then, about the householder, about his affirmation of a disciplined this-worldly life as the good life. The chapters comprising it, each complete in itself, contribute to the elaboration of the main theme. I begin with a discussion of the ideology of the householder in which the purposes and procedures of the good life, lived in affirmation of the values of plenitude and detachment, are spelled out (Chapter 1). The householder's way of life is further examined in the light of the fundamental values of auspiciousness and purity (Chapter 2). It is shown to be marked by the endeavour to establish a balance between, and, in fact, overcome the trap of, binary opposites such as asceticism and eroticism (Chapter 3). It acknowledges the sovereignty of good: the desired must be brought under the regime of, and encompassed by, the preferred (Chapter 4). And the final testimony of the good life is the good death which one endeavours to attain without fear (Chapter 5). All this is what the tradition says: but definitions of the good life change, new values emerge, causing perplexities. Thus, the modern Indian is invited by the world around him to define his life in terms of the ideologies of secularism, development and democracy which have been diffused from the West. The translation of cultural traditions from one into another is, however, always problematic and the modern Hindu suffers from the strain of a fragmented consciousness. It is with a statement of this predicament that the book ends (Epilogue).

The data on which the book is based are derived from three main sources: first, my own intensive fieldwork among the Brahmans of the Kashmir Valley (Chapters 1, 2 and 5) and more general inquiries among some Brahman communities of Uttar Pradesh (Chapter 2); second, written ethnographic accounts, mostly published, of some Hindu (or Hinduized) com-

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munities of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka (Chapter 2); and third, contemporary works of fiction dealing with ancient and contemporary times in Bihar, north India, Karnataka and Tamilnadu (Chapters 3 and 4). Some historical and sociological works have been consulted to present the modern quest for Hinduism (Epilogue).

Though the data used in this book are mainly about Brahmans, the cultural themes they illustrate are, I think, of much wider import. It is, of course, well known that cultural diversity within Hindu society, in terms of inter-regional and inter-caste differences (not to bring in the dimension of diachrony), is so great that every general statement about it is suspect—that the sociology of Hindu society can at best be an exercise in suspicion—and that the more trained we are the more likely it is that we will ourselves doubt what we write or say. While the need for caution could hardly be over-stressed, I do not think we should allow ourselves to be dazzled by ethnographic diversity into a condition of sightlessness.

We must ceaselessly endeavour to look beyond the enormous variety of cultural forms for some major themes or 'dynamic affirmations' which are the 'key' to their 'character, structure and direction',[2] and which through mutual reinforcement or mutual limitation bestow on all of them a civilizational distinctiveness. These themes, it may be expected, will find more elaborate articulation in the world-views of certain Hindu castes and communities with their long literary traditions, which in the main link them to one another, than of others, but they are of general applicability. This is true above all of the high value placed on the life of the householder, which is what the good life means, and has always meant, to most Hindus irrespective of differences of caste, sect or region. What is more, in all matters involving the performance of rituals under the direction of Brahman priests, the values, beliefs and customs of the Brahmans themselves have spread to other castes and communities, producing a palpable cohesiveness among Hindus (see Srinivas 1967). This book is thus about Hindu society, though

[2] I have employed here some words and phrases from a long-forgotten paper by Morris Opler. I should hasten to add, though, that my use of the word 'theme' does not follow Opler's closely (see Opler 1945).

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the thematic perspectives offered are first and foremost of the Brahmans.

Turning from the scope of the book to the data on which it is based: the use of data generated through my own inquiries and of published ethnographic and historical works has posed no more than the usual problems for me. I have taken a risk, however, in consciously moving away from the beaten tracks and choosing to treat novelists with respect as highly motivated informants, and novels as first or second order interpretations of socio-cultural reality which provide invaluable insights into the moral perplexities that a people experience. Such interpretations themselves have to be interpreted, however, to supplement and stimulate ethnography.

Anticipating scepticism on the part of some colleagues, I had clarified briefly the justification for my reliance upon works of fiction in the essay that appears as Chapter 3 in this book. I had referred to the novels chosen as the basis of my discussion as 'fragments of the original discourse of contemporary Hindu intellectuals'. Further, I had pointed out that, if a novel appeals to a wide variety of readers, it must tell us something that is of deep and general concern in their society: its significance is made manifest through a shared grammar of response. I might, however, add a few words of elucidation.

Now, the fundamental question raised in the novels I have chosen for discussion is about the struggle of the individual, considered as a moral agent, to grapple with the contrary and powerful pulls of asceticism and eroticism (see Chapter 3). This struggle is one of the abiding themes of Hindu classical literature, as it is of living folklore. It is also the very stuff of everyday life. Is there a Hindu villager, illiterate and unsophisticated though he may be, who is not familiar with the debauchee and the ascetic, with the life of sensuality as opposed to that of spirituality? Similarly (turning to the other chapter, in this book, based on a novel), are extra-marital love and illegitimacy not moral problems faced by every village community in India one time or another? It is true that extant ethnographic accounts are usually silent on these issues; but even ethnographers know how significant these moral problems are in the so-called real life.

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It may be argued that such predicaments are present, but that the kind of moral discourse found in novels is unfamiliar; this really depends upon who one is talking with. Not only is the social distribution of knowledge within a community uneven, but its expression, too, is multivocal. The so-called common people have access to the same sources of tradition as the literati, though the channels of communication are different and there are, therefore, differences in the form of the messages that they exchange among themselves.

The characteristically Platonic dichotomy between cognition and creative imagination has persisted to the present day, but it did not prevent Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud from deriving inspiration from literature. While the former referred to Prometheus as the foremost saint and martyr in the philosopher's calendar, the latter—Freud of course considered himself very much a scientist—confessed that wherever he went he found a poet had been there before him. More recently, Erving Goffman (1961), David Plath (1980) and others have by their brilliant use of incidents and characters from novels shown the immense scope of illuminations that the novel affords to the social scientist. Rather than elaborate further, I will only say that I find the distinction between 'real' and 'imagined' worlds, when pressed too far, unduly limiting (see Berger 1977).

A few words about my approach to the elucidation of the selected themes are now in order. To put it simply, my method is ethnographic, that is, it is descriptive and interpretive and based on the assumption that it is culture-laden, or meaningful, social relations which are our primary concern: individuals and events interest us only derivatively (that is, relationally). Reflecting upon the data at my disposal, I seek to present interpretations of certain crucial relationships (husband and wife, parent and child), events (death), predicaments or moral dilemmas (extra-marital love, annunciation or renunciation of the householder's life, modernization), and values (auspiciousness, purity, selflessness, fidelity, piety). I use the word interpretation with some hesitation for fear that it is currently fashionable in some scholarly circles but, given the prevailing paradigmatic factionalism in social-cultural anthropology, it raises serious misgivings in others. I should therefore explain my position in a little more detail.

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As I write in Chapter 1, I am not searching for explanations of human behaviour in terms of causes or determinants, though I do not deny that human actions may be seen to have material causes, practical ends and concrete consequences. I know that 'love' has been characterized as the 'independent variable' in the Bengali Hindu kinship system (see Inden and Nicholas 1977: 88), but that is not what my approach is to the study of culture. My focus is not on causal chains but on subjective meanings. I have tried to understand and explicate some commonsense notions, as also some relatively refined categories of thought in terms of which Hindus make sense of their everyday life to themselves. They do so through the piecing together or connecting of ideas and actions, of memories of the past, predicaments of the present, and hopes or visions of the future, and this too is interpretation. But while the interpretations fabricated by the people themselves may seem adequate and explicit to them, they may yet be opaque to the outsider, which is what the social anthropologist usually is, in one sense or another: if not born in another society, his training as an anthropologist teaches him to turn a sceptical eye at everything that seems familiar. In other words, depending upon who he is, he either seeks to live intimately with strangers or acts the stranger among intimates.

I agree with those students of human cultures, such as Clifford Geertz, who deny that anthropologists have any special gifts for empathy and powers of imagination. The people's interpretations are, therefore, our data, just as what we hear and see are our data. They are the principles, as Louis Dumont might say, in terms of which we are able to make sense of what is heard or seen and, as such, they belong to a higher level than the other data. In other words, our informants are not just informers, they are also interpreters, but their perspectives on everyday life may not always converge. The commentaries of the Hindu householder and the renouncer on life in the world will surely not be the same.

Interpretation thus involves the social anthropologist in a process of unfolding or unravelling what are at first riddles to him, by working out their implications. It is not only the idea with which we set out that gets explicated through this process, but also its collateral or opposite, its principle of control. We

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move from simplicity to complexity and hope 'to formulate clearly what one has more or less confusedly perceived' (Dumont 1970: 36). This mode of interpretation consists of observation of the flux of everyday life and a turning away from it to seek the sources of its stability; it involves believing the people and disbelieving them too; it entails the connecting of the concrete with the abstract—in short, it is a search with the critical eye and ear for significance and structure.

Just as the internal interpreters are several, the external interpreters also may be many, each capturing a particular facet of social reality—visualizing it as a system, a structure, a stratagem, a text, consciousness, or whatever—and providing a perspective on it. To say this is not to surrender to nihilism, but to affirm the legitimacy and value of pluralism. I will not, however, go so far as to suggest that the birth of the interpreters of action may be seen to signal the death of the authors of action. I claim no more than having raised some basic questions about the constitution of the good life in Hindu society and to have provided some intimations about how they may be answered in terms of the conceptual categories of the people. In the final reckoning, I know that the people among whom I have done fieldwork, or about whom I have read, know much more about themselves than I ever will, though I may know things about them that they themselves do not. Indeed, as Horace told us long ago, we are not permitted to know all things. The illusions of completeness or permanence that an ethnographic text creates are useful and partake of the truth, but they are, nevertheless, illusions. The interpretive endeavour knows no finality—which does not mean that it is uninterested in theoretical conclusions—but only turnings and pauses and understandings and, then, new turnings. Each understanding is a preface to yet another, each 'arrival' a 'point of departure'. As the questions change, so do the answers, and the completeness of description is inevitably deferred. I believe the positivists of yesteryear knew this as well as the grammatologists of today. The aims and the nature of the endeavour are, however, clear: namely, the effort to make sense of what the people we seek to understand think and do, and as Max Weber puts it, to grasp how they 'confer meaning and significance' on their lives. Our interpretations are thus not pictures of empirical reality, and

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intentionally so. They are descriptive but they are not merely description. We do not only *look* and *listen*, we also *think*.

THE THEMES

I should now like to introduce the various themes discussed in this book under the broad rubric of *the good life*. The opening chapter, 'Domesticity and Detachment', was originally presented at a conference on the Indian concepts of person held at Harvard in 1976, and later published in that form (see Madan 1983). A revised version had already been published earlier (see Madan 1981b), and the interpretation offered in the two versions was the same. The text used here is that of the 1981 version, with some minor alterations.

It may be pointed out that, though my discussion of the ideology of the householder is based on my studies of the Brahmans of the Kashmir Valley, there is, as already stated, ample evidence in indological and ethnographical literatures of the life of the householder being the most highly valued in Hindu society. To present but one more piece of evidence here, we find that many of the major protestant sectarian movements of medieval times, which count their followers in millions today, emphasized the virtues of disciplined domesticity as against renunciation. Basava (*c.* 1125–1170?), the founder of the Lingayat sect in the south, Nanak (1469–1538), the first of the Sikh gurus in the north, Vallabha (1479–1531), the promulgator of the *puṣṭi mārga* (way of abundance) in the west, and Chaitanya (1485–1534), founder of a popular sect in the east based on an exultation in divine and conjugal love, extolled domesticity as the good life as long as it was an affirmation of the bliss of the union of the devotee and the deity, and not a contradiction of it.

While the Lingayat and the Sikh faiths steadfastly upheld the value of domesticity and the sanctity of conjugal love, some of the other sects did slide occasionally into eroticism without formally abandoning the domestic ideal. As pointed out earlier in this Introduction, the *dharmaśāstra* literature, and, in fact, the epics also, are highly eulogistic of the householder's state. In view of such evidence, it seems legitimate to suggest that an ideology of the householder exists in Hindu society. The

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householders are not merely given empirically, in defiance of the ideology of renunciation, but domesticity is also a positive value orientation, just as renunciation is. This raises the important question of the relationship between two apparently antithetical ideologies.

It is obvious that the two ideologies cannot prevail at the same level. A hierarchical view is, therefore, imperative. If we maintain that, though renunciation is not normal (in the sense of not being common), and is yet the most highly idealized state, the values then expressed through renunciation are all-encompassing: the householder may, obviously, live only in the shadow of the renouncer, and, if not merging in him, be certainly guided by him. This, indeed, would seem to be the implication of the emphasis upon detachment (*virakti*) laid by the Kashmiri Brahmans I have studied and doubtless by millions of tradition-oriented Hindus. But, as Dumont puts it (in another context), 'the moment [a] second function is defined, it entails reversals for the situations belonging to it' (1982: 225). The hostility towards renouncers, which is paradoxically combined with reverence for them among householders (and of which I write in Chapter 1), would seem to point to the vulnerability, if not also the inauthenticity, of the choice of renunciation if it flows from a sense of defeat rather than of fulfilment. It is only when one has fulfilled the obligations of householdership, and also enjoyed them, that one may experience desirelessness, which is the essential condition of renunciation. The paradox disappears: the repudiation of renunciation by the householder does not affect its validity as a value at the higher level.

The householder, I suggest, hears at his front door, day after day, the knock of the sannyasi, who literally stands there asking for alms and promising a future (even instant) possibility. At the same time, he hears at his back door, as it were, the knock of the *bhogi* (enjoyer, sensualist), who invites him to a life of unbridled pleasure. The value of his state of householdership is challenged and threatened by both alternatives. His success would, therefore, seem to lie in his ability to resist complete surrender to either and combine the principles of domesticity (*gārhasthya*) and detachment (*virakti*).

Domesticity for the Hindu is inseparable from a feeling of

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well-being and happiness, embodying the values of auspiciousness and purity—the theme of the second chapter. It is reproduced here without any major change from the volume (see Carman and Marglin 1985) which resulted from a conference on auspiciousness and purity held in 1980 at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., under the auspices of the Conference on Religion in South India. It is an exploratory essay and suggests a line of inquiry for elucidating the significance of the relatively neglected notion of auspiciousness (*śubha*) in relation to the much studied notion of purity (*śuddha*), namely, to examine it as referring essentially to the significance of temporal events in human lives. As a pervasive value in domestic life, auspiciousness is not confined to upper caste Hindus, though it is a more important motif in their households. All over India, one sees graphic representations of auspiciousness in the form of geometric or floral patterns (made with white lime powder, yellow turmeric powder, red brick dust, etc., or with pastes of them) on the façades of homes and on the ground in front of them. I have seen these signs of auspiciousness in the huts of the poorest, low caste, illiterate villagers as well as in the homes of the rich upper castes. These graphic representations, almost invariably made by women (suggesting a special relationship between auspiciousness and femininity), are derived from *maṇḍala* and *yantra*, which are abstract depictions of an orderly cosmos.

I have read a number of important discussions of auspiciousness, or of other themes that include discussions of it, in the last five years since I wrote my own essay—by, among others, Veena Das, Frédérique Marglin and Vasudha Narayanan. Some of them seem to reinforce the approach suggested by me, while others have extended their inquiries in related ways. Thus, Das (1982: 143ff) rightly seeks to construct a unified paradigm of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, purity and pollution, and life and death. That her commendable effort needs both qualification and clarification only underscores the complexity of the task in hand. For example, she does not allow of the possibility of thinking of death as auspicious in certain circumstances (see Narayanan 1985 and Chapter 5 below). Marglin thinks that it is 'premature to restrict the meaning of those terms which are translated as auspicious-

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ness to the passage of time' (1985: 293). She is perhaps right, perhaps not.[3] What is important is that the notion of auspiciousness is being increasingly recognized as an important subject requiring careful study.

I am convinced that the well-established emphasis on the study of purity/impurity, though undoubtedly of fundamental importance in the study of Hindu society, does not provide by itself a sufficiently adequate framework of values for the study of domestic life. This realization dawned upon me many years ago in the course of my study of family life among the Kashmiri Brahmans, who are, therefore, my first teachers on this subject. It seems to me that a unified theory of auspiciousness and purity would provide yet another link between caste and the family in the domain of values, that is, in terms of the notion of the good life. Auspiciousness/inauspiciousness is also a feature of intercaste relations as I point out in passing in my discussion (Chapter 2 below).[4]

Chapter 3, 'Asceticism and Eroticism', originally written in 1978 and published three years later (see Madan 1981a), is reproduced here with some minor changes. In it I develop further the notion of the tension of the two extremes of asceticism (*tapas*) and eroticism (*kāmuktā*) which the life of the householder, as discussed in Chapter 1, seeks to overcome. This is, of course, one of the fundamental moral dilemmas treated for very long in Hindu literary, philosophical and mythological traditions. The renouncer and the enjoyer are both towering personalities; the one proclaims self-control (*ātma-niyantraṇa*), and the other proclaims the power of enjoyment (*bhoga*). The king is the ideal enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*). But, it is argued in this chapter, the life of enjoyment, when apotheosized, leads to perdition, just as renunciation may turn out to be an empty gesture of self-mortification.

[3] The word Marglin herself cites most often in the context of auspiciousness is *maṅgala* It is of interest to note that some lexicographers have derived *maṅgala* from *maṅg* which indicates movement—in first person, to move, to go.

[4] It may be noted that in this Introduction as also in Chapters 1, 2 and 5 I have focused on certain key verbal symbols because it seems to me that people's perception of the situations they find themselves in and, therefore, their manner of relating to them, are shaped significantly by lexical categories. I do not, however, want to commit myself to this methodological position dogmatically at the cost of underestimating the importance of grammar.

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All this is well known. The point I want to stress here is that the *ideal* Hindu solution to this moral dilemma is not a simple harmonization of opposites, though many knowledgeable scholars seem to think so. Thus, an otherwise fascinating recent study of passion and renunciation in Hindu culture characterizes the 'harmonization of contrary impulses . . . as a recurrent theme in Indian culture and as an issue which is at once intimately personal and mysteriously universal' (Siegel 1983: xi). The moral perplexity of the Hindu is, indeed, 'intimately personal' and 'mysteriously universal', but his *ideal* by way of a response to it is the cultivation of a moral sensibility which carries one beyond having to make moral choices and coerce oneself into a particular course of action. A widely influential contemporary Hindu philosopher, J. Krishnamurti, puts it thus: 'What is important, surely, is to be aware without choice, because choice brings about conflict. The chooser is in confusion, therefore he chooses; if he is not in confusion there is no choice' (Lutyens 1970: 70).[5] The good life is, then, above all a life of freedom from external controls: it is an inner state of maturation and grace.

Chapter 4 is a continuation of the discussion on the fragility of moral choices. A heightened moral awareness is the *ideal*, but the road to it is seen by ordinary people to lie in the consistent effort of self-improvement through attention to the proper (culturally defined) conduct of life. This is the process of maturation discussed in Chapter 1 in the context of the notion of the good life as Kashmiri Brahmans entertain it. While the pitfalls of making moral choices in a spirit of *ahaṁkāra* or hubris are recognized in Hindu culture (see Chapter 3), the importance of bringing what one desires (*preyas*) under the control of

[5] The Hindu notion of 'choiceless awareness', which perhaps appears exotic from a modern point of view, may, on reflection, not seem so strange after all. Consider the following observation by the philosopher Richard Wollheim, which parallels the idea of the gradual transition from deliberate choice-making to choiceless awareness through a process of maturation: 'My suggestion, then, is that the development of, or development beyond, the superego is best understood in this way: that the internal figure, or the group of internal figures, whose phantasized activities regulate the thoughts, feelings, and conduct of the person start off life as merely internalized figures—they "confront" the ego but, gradually, or at some rate depending upon circumstances, they come to be figures with whom the person is able to identify' (1984: 218).

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what one ought to prefer (*śreyas*) is also stressed. In fact, the two perspectives are seen as mutually reinforcing rather than as contradictory. The moral effort involved is great, but failing to make the endeavour causes suffering. A traditional Hindu viewpoint is that he who thinks that he proclaims his freedom by defying cultural norms, in fact announces his servitude to impulses: ungoverned senses (*avaśyendriyaḥ*) indeed become the ruling passions, and ultimately lead to suffering (*duḥkha*). The theme of suffering, and of preparation for death, which are of central importance in Indian (Buddhist, Jaina, Hindu) world-views, are introduced in Chapter 4, but I have neither the data nor the scholarship to deal with the former at any length.

There is, however, one kind of human suffering—that associated with death—which I discuss in Chapter 5. A concern with longevity has long been present in Hindu culture, as in many other cultures: it goes back to Vedic times when the desire to live a hundred years was repeatedly voiced and associated with progeny and prosperity. It is not therefore surprising that the *brāhmaṇa* rituals were mostly concerned with prolonging life. There was also the idea of the possibility of exchanging an old body for a new one (see Chapter 3). The notion of the good life lived in the light of ethical norms became salient later on, but never completely displaced the value placed upon plenitude. Besides, the hope of postponing death through rituals gradually gave way to the philosophic attitude of the Upanishads. The notion of *karma* came to be recognized as the primary cause of birth and death. It also became the basis of the ethical doctrine of works and retribution: as the Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad puts it, 'Verily, one becomes good through good deeds and evil through evil deeds' (III.ii.13).

Consequently, one is taught in the Hindu tradition to try to overcome evil, not to fear death. In fact, birth and death are not considered ontologically separate but recurrent events in a cosmo-moral process. Some anthropologists have defined birth as a latent root paradigm of Hindu culture. 'Each of the *saṁskāra*', Inden and Nicholas write, 'is an overt act of birth in a symbolic disguise' (1977: 91): I think they should have said 'an act of birth, death, rebirth . . .'. It is through such a philosophic notion, and the longing for and hope of divine grace (a still later idea than *karma*), that Hindus hope to cope

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with death and, indeed, elevate it to the status of being the final and most reliable witness to the good life.[6] But from the Hindu point of view the last moments of a life cannot outweigh or cancel all that has preceded them (though this happens in some mythological tales of divine grace). Performing rituals, seeking the intervention of saints, listening to holy scriptures, reliving old myths, and residing in sacred places (described in Chapter 5) are all supplementary devices, inferior to the philosophic attitude as a means to cope with death and the fear and suffering associated with it.

In the five chapters comprising the core of this book I have attempted to present interpretations of a tradition-based view of the life of the man-in-the-world as the good life in contrast to the life of the renouncer. I have made no mention of the fractured world of the 'modern' (and 'modernizing') Hindus, which is a curious medley of ancient monuments and half-formed new structures. Karl Marx diagnosed well the roots of the Hindu's melancholy: the 'loss of his old world with no gain of a new one' (Marx 1853). Their way of life, which the Hindus share at the margins with other non-Hindu Indians, is marked by uncertainties. The good life is now being defined in terms of borrowed criteria, namely, Western liberal ideals of material prosperity, political democracy, and secularism. The outlook on life of no modern Indian—neither of Tagore nor of Gandhi or Nehru—can be understood without taking India's encounter with the West into consideration—an encounter which has involved, first, the loss of the 'self' and, then, various attempts to recover it.[7] The quest for Hinduism, of which I write in the Epilogue, is part of this larger re-search for identity—and a major theme of so-called 'modern Indian

[6] Lamenting the absence of a notion of the 'good death' in contemporary American culture, Bateson writes: 'The timing of death, like the ending of a story, gives a changed meaning to what preceded it. Death is also the moment of a gift that the old give to the young, a last opportunity to teach about life, but is so shaped by accident and happenstance that the moment may pass and wisdom is often unexpressed' (1984: 206). Most Pandits would fully agree with the foregoing, though some might deny that 'accident and happenstance' have any place in human lives.

[7] One of the most insightful and interesting interpretations of this phenomenon of the loss and attempted recovery of the self among the 'modern' Hindus is that of the psychologist Ashis Nandy (1983).

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culture'. I have thought it best to summon many witnesses, mostly Hindus, to present in their own words the predicament of the 'modern' Indian as they have individually or collectively viewed it. That my effort at interpretation of this phenomenon is inconclusive is, perhaps, a reflection of my own inadequacies as an interpreter, than of the present situation of the Hindu itself.

On the influences that make me the kind of author–interpreter I am, I would rather be silent. Were I to begin to identify them myself, I might soon run the risk of causing embarrassment to the very persons whom I would wish to thank. All I may say, therefore, is that I was born a Hindu and trained as a sociologist–social anthropologist. This combination has made me some kind of an 'insider–outsider' in relation to my own society (see Madan 1975b). There is nothing particularly unique about such a split (or compound) identity. And, as the psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar says, 'boundary spaces between cultures are not necessarily bad places to live in' (1982: 9).

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I

DOMESTICITY AND DETACHMENT

Why should we renounce the lovely world?
Our love of Him is our austerity . . .

KRISHNA RAZDAN

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.
I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand
bonds of delight.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

INTRODUCTORY

In a justly influential essay on renunciation in Indian religions, Louis Dumont suggested that 'the secret of Hinduism may be found in the dialogue between the renouncer and the man-in-the-world' (1960: 37f). Dumont was not, of course, the first person to draw attention to these two 'human types' in the Hindu universe: his contribution lay, rather, in his insistence that the renouncer and the man-in-the-world are best understood in terms of their relationship of opposition *and* complementarity. In this chapter (based on an essay written in honour of Louis Dumont) I make an effort to pursue his significant observation about 'the dialogue' by examining the place of the *gṛhastha* (householder) among the native Brahmans of Kashmir Valley, known generally as the Pandits.[1] I have described else-

[1] The word Pandit is, of course, the Sanskrit *paṇḍita* for scholar. The Pandits I know best are of the rural areas in the south-eastern part of the Kashmir Valley. Inquiries made over twenty odd years have convinced me that there is an impressive homogeneity in Pandit culture. Though the Pandits are divided into two sub-castes (priests and the others), and differences of socio-economic status and regional subculture also are found among them, these differences are not relevant in the context of the issues dealt with in this chapter, which are of the nature of the *principles* underlying social action rather than its *details* as observed in everyday life.

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where at length (see Madan 1965) that the householder occupies the central place in everyday life in Pandit society: in fact, *he is the typical Pandit*. Here I try to delineate some crucial elements in the Pandit ideology of the householder.

It should be clarified here that, underlying the earlier account (Madan 1965), there was an implicit assumption of social relations as the basic phenomenon, which resulted in inadequate attention being paid to the cultural aspect of social reality. The corrective does not lie, of course, in replacing one parochialism, as it were, by another but, rather, in adopting a multidimensional approach to the interpretation of the data about everyday life. The study of ideas and beliefs must take place in the context of observable behaviour and *vice versa*.

Following Dumont (1957: 12), the kind of ideas I am interested in here are those that the Pandits themselves employ to bring out the purposiveness and meaningfulness of their institutions: ideas that embody norms and values, stating what is axiomatic and not to be questioned, but also enabling people to make choices in respect of both the purposes of human pursuits and the appropriate procedures for their fulfilment within the overall framework of *dharma*. Social relations may thus be seen as animated—whether sustained or altered—by such ideas.

There is need for caution, however, for, as Dumont (1980: 36f) has pointed out, ideas and values are not everything and they do not by themselves comprise socio-cultural reality, just as externally observable behaviour alone does not do so. While ideas provide the framework for the interpretation of behaviour, behaviour—that which actually happens—provides what Dumont (1977: 27) calls 'control', preventing the misunderstandings that an overweening emphasis on ideas alone might generate. In short, I am not setting up a mutually exclusive dichotomy of culture and society, but insisting that we recognize that social action is suffused with meaning and that intentions are central to it. Purposes are not causes, however, nor do I want to explain anything in confident teleological terms. This is an interpretive essay concerned with what Schutz (1976) calls 'constructs of typicalities'.

People's ideas are difficult to get at and analyse. They are not there for the ethnographer to pick up, as it were; he has to

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look for them and, indeed, ferret them out through intensive fieldwork. The ethnographic text is not a 'faithful' account of what has been seen and heard, but involves reconstruction and redescription—some scholars prefer to call it 'translation'—of what has been seen and heard, in the light of, first, people's own concepts of everyday life and its larger purposes and, second, the ethnographer's theoretical presuppositions about the nature of social life and the significance of people's ideas.

It is important that one seeks a fusion between the view from within (ideas, meanings) and the view from without (behaviour, rules), for anthropology is, as Dumont (1970: 157) has rightly pointed out, understanding born of the tension of these two perspectives. 'In this task', Dumont writes, 'it is not sufficient to translate the indigenous words, for it frequently happens that the ideas which they express are related to each other by more fundamental ideas *even though they are unexpressed.* Fundamental ideas literally "go without saying" and have no need to be distinct, that is tradition. Only their corollaries are explicit' (1957: 12).[2]

It is obvious that to achieve the foregoing objective, the ethnographer has to seek the companionship of informants in a joint endeavour of exploration of meaning in the minutiae of everyday life. Informants are not always forthcoming with general formulations. As Weber pointed out, 'actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning' (1947: 111f). The reasonable assumption that one makes in this regard is that it is inconceivable that a person does not have a view of life and its purposes—*a weltanschauung*—even if he has not explicitly formulated it. The point really is that he may be expected to formulate it. The ethnographer, therefore, invites the informants to reflect on their everyday life, discuss their behaviour, examine its purposes (not only the specific intentions that prompt particular actions but, and more importantly, general purposes also), evaluate procedures, and assign meanings. This may be done retrospectively as Schutz (1976) suggests.

In short, the ethnographer tries to formulate explicitly what

[2] Cf.: 'To be sure, the more standardized the prevailing action pattern is, the more anonymous it is, the greater is the subjective chance of conformity and, therewith, of the success of intersubjective behaviour' (Schutz 1967: 33).

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the informants know implicitly and vaguely, perhaps only confusedly. His task is to connect and then redescribe what he observes and what he is told, without loss of meaning, and to interpret what is given in the informants' beliefs and their ready or coherent and not-so-coherent knowledge of their culture. Belief, knowledge and understanding are, of course, not one and the same thing.

Needless to emphasize, the ethnographer is not able to engage in and sustain such productive interaction with every informant. Fortunately, there are reflective individuals everywhere who are curious about their own culture and think about it.[3] But almost everyone—including children—contributes to the ethnographer's knowledge and understanding of the way of life he is attempting to understand. In the final synthesis that he endeavours to construct, the ethnographer assigns different kinds and degrees of significance to the various contributions, including his own, and establishes connection between them. This, then, is the manner in which the data embodied in this chapter were generated. It might be added that what I am dealing with here is, by and large, the Pandit oral tradition.[4]

[3] Schutz (1967: 61) refers to this phenomenon as the 'social distribution of knowledge': 'each individual knowing merely a sector of the world and common knowledge of the same sector varying individually as to its degree of distinctness, clarity, acquaintanceship, or mere belief'.

In this connexion I might add that my informants in the village of Utrassu-Umanagri, where most of my fieldwork has been done (see Madan 1965), accept without demur the fact that some of them know more than the others about certain matters. One does not question what one does not know but seeks clarifications about it from others. I have, for instance, written elsewhere about the general lack of interest in genealogical materials among the Pandits combined with a deep interest in them on the part of some (see Madan 1975b: 141–6).

[4] I would like to explain that, though nearly all the adult male Pandits of Utrassu-Umanagri during the late 1950s were literate, not more than a dozen could claim proficiency in Sanskrit or scholarship in traditional literature dealing with metaphysical problems or ritual performances. The priests, of course, had a reading knowledge of Sanskrit, particularly in the *śāradā* script, but the few true *paṇḍita* who lived in the village were from among the non-priestly families. Not many households possessed any books other than almanacs and children's schoolbooks. The most commonly found 'religious' texts were the Bhagavad Gita and books of prayers and hymns. A few households owned astrological books. The epics—the Mahabharata and the Ramacharitamanas—were also found in some homes, not always in the original Sanskrit or Avadhi but in Urdu prose

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SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY: '*Bhaṭṭil*' AND '*Gārhasthya*'

Selfhood and personhood

To give a systematic account of the Pandit ideology of the householder, it seems appropriate to begin with the Pandit conception of socio-cultural identity—of 'personhood'—for even those who may not be householders are yet Pandits, members of the community (*barādarī*, the 'fraternity').[5] Some Pandits among the many I have talked with about the presuppositions of their culture have emphasized the importance of going deeper than the level of personhood (man-in-society) and attending to what they consider the most fundamental notion of all, namely 'selfhood', expressed in the ancient question, 'Who am I?' According to the Pandits, what distinguishes human beings from other sentient beings is their capacity for introspection (*cintan*) and self-realization (*ātmajñāna*). Though most Pandits are only dimly aware of the monistic teaching of Kashmir Shaivism (see Chatterji 1914), many affirm identity with Shiva —*Śivoham*, I am Shiva!—as the true goal of the seeker and, therefore, the only valid answer to the question of selfhood. This is, however, by no means a general concern and occupies only the cognoscenti.

When confronted by me with the foregoing formulation, the majority of the Pandits I have talked with averred that such knowledge (*jñāna*) is beyond the comprehension of the common man and of not much avail to him, enmeshed as he is in 'the veil of illusion' (*māyā-jāl*) of everyday life. This is stated more in a matter-of-fact way than in a self-deprecatory tone. They assert that the inward-looking emphasis on selfhood is not the common man's problem: his concern is the proper performance

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translations. Centuries of persecution at the hands of Muslim rulers had already brought the Pandits of Kashmir to this sad pass by the middle of the nineteenth century when Hindu rule was re-established. This is why I have chosen to describe the Pandit tradition as 'oral'. A lament on the decline of the Pandit literary tradition remains to be written.

[5] '*Barādarī*' is a Persian word. Most Kashmiri words are of either Sanskrit or Persian derivation, but the difference in pronunciation between the original and the derivative words is often considerable. Thus, Kashmiris hardly ever use aspirated consonant sounds. For the sake of comparability of the linguistic material, I have used the original Sanskrit or Persian words whenever I could identify these (see Kachru 1973).

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of social roles (*duniyā-dārī*, 'world-maintenance') in consonance with *dharma*. In other words, it is the pressing, if not the paramount, reality of everyday life, demanding constant attention and action, which is the primary concern of most Pandits and, they believe, of most human beings. (Whether this is fortunate or unfortunate, the Pandits maintain, is another question.) And the householder is the *duniyā-dār* (man-in-the-world) *par excellence*. In the context of such an involvement in everyday life, answering the question 'Who am I?' still remains important, but from the perspective of social interaction or personhood rather than withdrawal from society and selfhood.

Apropos personhood, two initial questions may now be posed. First, how does one know a person to be a Pandit? Second, how do the Pandits themselves define their socio-cultural identity and communicate it to others when the need for doing so arises?

External signs of Pandit identity

The Pandits refer to themselves, and are referred to by other Kashmiri-speaking people, as the Bhaṭṭa. The word is of Sanskrit origin and means a learned person and one who is concerned with communicating or the telling of what there is to know.[6] Needless to say, not every Pandit is a scholar, or in possession of esoteric knowledge, and the etymology of the word *bhaṭṭa* is of no practical significance. It is simply used to designate those Kashmiris who are not Muslims or Sikhs.

There are many outward signs of recognition of a Pandit and of places and events associated with him. The traditional clothing of Pandit men, women and children is different from that of their Muslim co-villagers. Though a non-Kashmiri might not easily recognize these differences in the case of men and children—there can be no mistaking a married Pandit woman's traditional or contemporary sartorial style for that of anyone else's—the Kashmiris themselves perceive them readily. Also, many Pandits, particularly women, wear the very visible *tyok* on their forehead—a mark made with sandalwood or rosewood paste, saffron, or *sindūr* (vermilion), or mixtures of these.

[6] *Bhaṭṭa* is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit *bhartṛ*, the honorific designation of learned Brahmans—it is a synonym of *paṇḍita*. It may be noted here that Kashmiri has been classified as a *prākrita*.

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When bare-headed, a Pandit man or boy may be recognized by his tuft of head-top hair (*chog*), but this is now less commonly found than it was a couple of generations ago. An adult Pandit male, who has stripped himself to the waist for a wash, or some other purpose, will always be recognized by the holy cord of three cotton strands (*yonya* or *yajñopavīta*)—characteristic of the twice-born castes all over India—worn round the neck, or round the neck and under the right arm.

Pandit houses look different from those of other Kashmiris, both inside and from outside. Their places of worship also are distinctive in appearance, as are their religious, wedding and funeral gatherings. The sight of flowers (particularly marigolds) and the sound of conch shells are characteristic of these events. Though they speak Kashmiri like the others, the Pandits' speech is more laden with Sanskrit than that of Muslims. Personal and family names, with a few exceptions, are also different.[7]

Most Pandit households earn their livelihood from land, service of various types (including domestic and government service), and/or trade. Such Pandits are called *Kārkun* ('those who work for profit'). A small minority carve out their living as priests (*Gor*) and are also referred to as the *Bhāṣā* (language, i.e., Sanskrit) *Bhaṭṭa*. The *Kārkun* and the *Gor* do not intermarry. The Pandits do not perform any of the functions associated with artisan or service castes in other parts of India: it is the Kashmiri Muslims who perform all these tasks. The Pandits and the Muslims are linked by co-residence in villages (or in urban neighbourhoods) and by economic transactions. There are no marriage and commensal relations between them and physical contact is severely restricted. Agreement between the communities is built upon an explicit recognition of differences between them (see Madan 1972). For the Pandits, the Muslims are the 'others' or 'outsiders' (*mleccha*) but not strangers (*vopar*), and *vice versa*.

[7] While no Pandit would have a personal name of Islamic origin, a secular word like the Persian *āftāb* (sun) or *mahtāb* (moon) was used in the past: there was a Mahtab Kaula in Utrassu-Umanagri in 1957–8. This points to Muslim (Persian and Afghan) cultural elements in Pandit culture, of which there is evidence in domestic architecture, music, food, clothing, speech, etc. Similarly, Kashmiri Muslims preserve many relics of their Hindu ancestry in their culture, the most interesting, or perhaps ironical, being the fact that a common family name among them is Bhat; there are some Muslim 'Pandit' families also.

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Pandit identity: self-ascription

By themselves the Pandits constitute not merely a single breed (*bīja* or *byol*, 'seed') but, more significantly, one *zāt*. The notion of *zāt* is subtler than that of the community of kith and kin and common customary behaviour. In fact, the word is used in two senses. Generally and rather loosely, it connotes the family name or the name of an occupational group. It is also used to convey the particular idea that a people (*quom*, the anthropologists' ethnic group), whether Pandits or any other, ultimately are what they are and do what they do because of their essential and inborn, but alterable, nature. Soils, plants, animals, human beings, gods—all have their *zāt* or essence. Among human beings it is considered to be a product of physical and moral elements: in fact, it may well be understood as the hierarchical relation between the two, with the moral element encompassing the physical. One's *zāt* may become refined through appropriate effort—what Marriott (1977) calls the process of maturation—or it may become corrupted through the neglect of moral duties. As an informant once put it to me, 'a Pandit is not the fruit of the pursuit of pleasure (*kāma*) but of moral duty (*dharma*)'. The reference is to the paramount duty of the householder to beget children—particularly sons—so that the lineage (*kula*) is continued and the manes are assured offerings of water (*treś, tarpaṇa* 'quenching of thirst', 'satiating') and food (*piṇḍa*) and their perdition is averted. In the process, the Pandit community also survives.

A Pandit is thus born a Pandit and there is no other way of acquiring this identity. One loses it by totally abandoning the traditional way of life, or the crucial elements of it, as when one eats and lives with Muslims or marries among them. Such actions result in a crucial alteration (deterioration) of one's *zāt*. A Pandit must, therefore, guard it always. I once asked a Pandit who had become a Muslim why he had done so. His answer was that it was a flaw in his *karma* that blinded him and made him go astray. I do not mean to suggest that every Pandit converted to Islam has such regrets: such conversions are, in any case, extremely rare. The point, rather, is that one who is repentant should think about it in terms of a moral

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lapse, a falling away from *dharma*, and, I might add, the consequent deterioration of one's *zāt*. Despite his regret, this man never mentioned the hope of a restoration of his lost status. He knew this loss to be irrevocable. And the Pandits of his village saw in him a fallen man—a very pitiable creature.

The significant relation between moral and physical elements in the make-up of a person does not mean the denial of importance to the physical foundation of personhood. On the contrary, it is dramatized at the beginning of all major rituals when the person performing a rite summons himself into existence, as it were, by pointing to and naming different parts of his body, beginning with his feet and culminating in his head, and purifying them by sprinkling water on them with blades of the purifying *darbha* grass (*Poa cynosuroides*).

Parenthood: biology and morality

According to the Pandits, the fact that sexual intercourse does not always lead to conception may be because of some bodily deficiency of the wife or husband. Barrenness is recognized as a physical incapacity, which may, however, have karmic causes. A childless wife may be jokingly advised by her friends to change her 'cover' or quilt (*vurun*)—that is, sleep with a man other than her husband—but this would, of course, be a reprehensible breach of moral conduct. Barrenness among women and infertility among men may be produced by disease, sorcery or the curse of people endowed with supernatural powers. But, ultimately, whether a couple will or will not be blessed with children, the much sought after sons in particular, is a question of fate (*prārabdha*), of *karma-lekhā* (the 'written', or the pre-ordained, results of one's actions in the previous life). In the normal course of events, there is no escape from the consequences of one's actions; only divine grace (*anugraha*) can come to one's rescue, but this is hard to obtain.

It is generally maintained that conception occurs when husband and wife reach orgasm simultaneously. Female orgasm is believed to result in the discharge of vital fluids into the womb which also receives the male 'seed'. Not only were my informants uncertain about the nature of the supposed female discharge, some of them also considered it to be of no consequence. The male seed is believed to contain in it all the

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requirements for the making of the complete human being: flesh, blood, all internal and external organs, hair, nails, intellect, knowledge, ignorance, health, disease, etc. It has the capacity to provide for the nurture of the foetus and subsequently of the new-born child. The mother's menstrual blood provides the 'soil' or 'bed' for the seed to grow in when it ceases to flow out and solidifies into the fleshy 'sack' which envelops and nourishes the foetus. It is because of this fact, some informants said, that Hindus have adopted the black stone *śālagrāma*, which resembles the womb in shape, as the iconic representation of Vishnu, the preserver. The growth of the child's body, which is already in the seed, depends upon the mother and her physical and moral condition. The original planting of the seed in the womb sets in process the milk-producing capacity of the mother who then suckles the child when it is born. In short, as one informant put it, the human seed is very much like the walnut which contains in itself the full-grown tree—incidentally the largest fruit-bearing tree in Kashmir.

Despite the potency of the male seed, the father's role is seen as rather accidental and episodic compared to the mother's sustained and intimate involvement with the child during both the pre-natal and post-natal stages. A Kashmiri proverb bluntly proclaims this intimacy: 'illegitimate or legitimate, I carried the child for nine months in my own womb'. In other words, while the physical bond between father and child may never be proven, there can be little doubt about it in the case of mother and child. Human life, the Pandits aver, consists of the obligation to repay debts (*ṛṇa*) incurred in the course of numerous lives: debts to gods, ancestors (including one's father), teachers, fellow human beings.

There is one debt, however, which never gets repaid because it cannot be repaid: this is the debt one owes one's mother (*mātṛ-ṛṇa*). There is no one—not excepting one's father, not even God—obedience to whom is enjoined more strictly on human beings than to one's mother. All one's kith and kin, including the father, may turn wicked, but the bad mother (*kumātā*) is unknown.[8] The bond between mother and child

[8] Stepmothers are, however, different. They are generally said to be cruel to the children of their husband's deceased wife, particularly when they have children

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is the moral bond of love *par excellence*—Fortes's axiom of amity (Fortes 1969: 219ff)—unsullied by the kinds of mundane considerations that enter into the father–son relationship. The Kashmiri woman is said to be a child-worshipper (*baca-parast*). The reverence for human mothers is paralleled by the Pandits' veneration for mother goddesses, particularly their patron goddesses Sharika and Ragnya, both addressed as *jagadambā*, 'universal mother', whom they accord a higher place in the divine hierarchy than their divine consorts. Mothers thus pervade both the human and the divine spheres.

Fathers also are obviously important: 'the seed flows clearing the way for the flow of property' is how an informant summed up the biological and social significance of the father–son bond. When I suggested to him (and other informants) that the way that the flow of 'seed' clears is not only for the downward transmission of property but also for the upward flow of food offerings (*piṇḍa*), they agreed with me. But there is a problem in respect of the father–child relationship. The mother has milk and she gives it all to her children. A woman may even die in childbirth, sacrificing her life for the sake of the child. The father has property and he shares it with his sons; in fact, he may try to deny this obligation. The mother gives absolutely of what she has, but the father does so only partially or conditionally: it is here that the seeds of household conflict often lie (see Madan 1965: chap. 8).

The father–child relationship is moral, even as the mother–child bond is, but it also has a material dimension: not only do sons share ancestral property with their father and inherit his share in it, daughters also receive a dowry and post-nuptial prestations from their natal family (see Madan 1975a: 231–41). Inheritance by sons and gifts to daughters (and their conjugal families) are governed by law and custom, and these may often be manipulated by particular individuals to suit their own

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of their own. I even heard stories about the attempts of some women to poison their stepchildren. Adoptive mothers are unpredictable. If a child has been foisted upon the issueless woman by her husband's relatives, she may not feel very attached to it, but mothers do often treat their adopted children with the same love and care as natural mothers do. Between the 'pangs of bearing' (*zenadod*) and 'the toils of rearing' (*racchandod*), the Pandits aver, it is hard to arbitrate, but in the ultimate analysis 'blood simmers in one's veins'.

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advantage. The Pandits often justify the actions of a son who fights his father over property, blaming the older man for such vices as covetousness or intolerance of others' points of view. They never condone the neglect by a son of the material needs of his mother, even if she is a stepmother. Leach's contention (see Leach 1961: 9) that economic constraints are prior to the constraints of kinship morality does not hold good of the mother–child relationship among the Pandits; it applies to the father–son relationship but only at the level of behaviour and not in terms of kinship ideology, in which filial piety is extolled as an imperative of *dharma*.

Property endures, as Leach (1961: 11) has pointed out, but so do the moral bonds between parents and children. An adult Pandit's first action in the morning, after he has performed ablutions and before he eats any solid food—the pious will not even drink anything—is to offer water to quench the 'thirst' (*treś*) of his manes, beginning with his own deceased parents. Moreover, twice a year he performs the *śrāddha* ritual for his parents on their respective death anniversaries (according to the Hindu lunar calender) and on the appropriate days during the annual fortnight-long 'feeding' of manes (*kāmbar-paccha*). *Piṇḍa* (conically shaped lumps of cooked rice) are offered to them symbolically and thrown into flowing waters or fed to birds after the ritual. Invited priests are then fed the favourite dishes of the deceased parents.

Other ancestors also receive *piṇḍa*: five lineal male ascendants beginning with one's father's father, on the occasion of the father's *śrāddha*, and father's mother, father's father's mother and so on up to the father's fourth lineal male ascendant's mother (FaFaFaFaMo), on the occasion of the mother's *śrāddha*. Still other ancestors, notably the mother's father, may also be offered *piṇḍa*, or—this is more likely—dry, uncooked rice, salt and fruits (called *sīddha*) may be given to the family priest in the name of the dead person. Those to whom one normally offers *piṇḍa* or *sīddha*, and their descendants, are one's *sapiṇḍa*: one is related to them through the ritual food offering, and a man must not take a wife from among them, or give a daughter or sister in marriage to them, within the limits defined by the food offering.[9] It is obvious that the Pandits dis-

[9] Legal texts translate the word *sapiṇḍa* to mean those 'connected by particles of

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approve of the mixing together or confusion of categories, the basic distinction in this context being between wife-givers and wife-takers (see Madan 1965: 105; 1975a), with others derived from it.

The nature of the parent–child relationship is thus specified in *dharma*, which declares the moral basis of the relationship and defines what its content should be. The Pandits are down-to-earth pragmatists and acknowledge that the dictates of *dharma* are often violated by people. Why should this be so? Why should considerations of economic gain emerge blatantly as prior to the dictates of morality in some cases? The Pandit answer is, '*havālayat*', that is, the notion that you may receive from your children what you gave unto them (to keep in 'safe custody', as it were) in the previous life. In short, it is *karma*.

Fate (*prārabdha*) informs the parent–child relationship at every step: from the initial step of *kanyādāna* (the gift of a maiden by her father to her chosen husband), through the intermediate step of *garbhādāna* (the receiving of the seed by the wife from the husband), to the ultimate step of *piṇḍadāna* (the post-mortuary gift of food by a son to his parents and other ancestors). This threefold pattern of gifts, given and received, is the defining characteristic of the domain of kinship and domesticity among the Pandits, forming the basis of a person's relations with (to borrow Schutz's terminology once again) his predecessors, consociates and successors. More generally, it is the very basis of the Pandit way of life and of the definition of cultural identity. Birth and death are physiological events found among all sentient beings. It is the specific cultural expression of these events, and what precedes, accompanies and follows them, that defines a Pandit and distinguishes him not only from all living beings but also and specifically from non-Pandits. Ethnophysiology, morality, ritual, custom

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one body' (see, e.g., Mayne 1950: 146); in doing so they follow Vijñāneśvara's twelfth-century text, known as the Mitākṣara. It would seem that this usage is also commonly employed by Hindus in Bengal in defining the category of 'one's own people', who are seen related to oneself as *eka-śārira* or *sapiṇḍa*, that is, by the 'same body' (Inden and Nicholas 1977: 3). The literal meanings of the word *piṇḍa*, it must be noted, include not only 'body' but also 'balls of cooked rice' offered to manes.

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and law—all these are elements in the definition of identity and of the cultural idiom in which it is expressed.

'Bhaṭṭil' : traditional purposes of life

The Pandits' conception of socio-cultural identity is given explicit expression in their notion of '*bhaṭṭil*', the *Bhaṭṭa* way of life. Needless to emphasize, they consider *bhaṭṭil* the best, that is, morally the most superior, way of life. It is constituted of a range of fundamental purposes of life (*puruṣārtha* or *abhiprāya*) largely centred in domestic life, and of appropriate procedures for their fulfilment. These purposes and procedures have their basis in tradition. When children—the great questioners in every society—and even curious adults ask of those who might know why something should be done in a particular manner, or done at all, the Pandit answer usually is: 'it is *bhaṭṭil*; it is our way of life'. If the questioner persists and demands a fuller answer, he is sought to be silenced by the utterance of the single exclamatory word '*ada!*'. As an affirmatory exclamation, '*ada*' would mean, 'that is the way it is', implying that 'this is the way it should be'. Put negatively, the connotation would be: 'there is no reason', implying that 'no reason need be given'. '*Ada*' could also be interpreted as a counter-question: 'What else is the way?' or 'why should I tell you?'

The foregoing gloss, I must clarify, is my attempt to decode this powerful verbal symbol on the basis of careful attention to the contexts and manner of its use. My informants never explained the term to me but left me in no doubt about its significance. It stands for the virtue (not merely an attitude) of unquestioning acceptance of the moral imperative. It is not employed in connection with the inevitability of natural or physiological processes, such as the change of seasons or death. There were many among my informants—the inevitable sceptics—who considered the notion of '*ada*' an expression of ignorance and/or irrationality; as they sarcastically put it, 'there is no higher *śāstra* among the *Bhaṭṭa* than the *ada-śāstra*'. It is obvious that we are here confronted with axiomatic truths which are the foundation of tradition everywhere. These truths were never stated to me in any systematic form by my informants. Certain overarching notions have, nevertheless, emerged

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quite clearly in the course of my conversations with individual Pandits and through group discussions. I now turn to some of these notions relevant to my present concern.

A Pandit's most precious possession, I have been repeatedly told, is his self. One's self is, of course, more than one's body (*śarīra*). The physical self or the body by itself is really of little significance. It is fragile, subject to deterioration, and readily perishable: it is *kṣaṇabhaṅgur*—that which may disintegrate any moment. It is when the body is joined to the inner self (*antarātma*) that it becomes the vehicle of *dharma*. It is, therefore, not the body but the network of dharmic relations that really matters. Thus the backbone of the family and the lineage is the relationship between ascendants and descendants in the male line affirmed in the *śrāddha*. He who neglects this first principle of treating the body as a means in the achievement of purposes beyond the body, and not an end in itself, turns out to be, in the words of an informant (who switched from Kashmiri to Hindi), '*tīn janama kā bhūkhā*', that is, one who remains spiritually starved through three lives—the previous, the present and the future. One's present life's difficulties indicate the neglect of *dharma* in the previous one; one's present failures ensure the difficulties of the next one. How does one meet this primary obligation of spiritual advancement? Through steadfast adherence to *bhaṭṭil* in whatever one does and in the manner one does it.

The demands of nature, while the body lasts, are not to be denied but fulfilled in accordance with *bhaṭṭil*. When this is done, one acquires fame (*yaś*) for righteous conduct in this world (*ihaloka*) and merit for the next (*paraloka*). The body is thus the meeting ground of the past, the present and the future; to put it differently, the present is the link between the past and the future. What one does with one's body and how the present is filled are then, obviously, matters of great import.

In the context of this concern, it is important to note that the Pandits' whole way of life is pervaded by a sense of auspiciousness (*śubha*) and purity (*śuddha, śauca*) and, consequently, by the fear of inauspiciousness and a concern with impurity.[10] While inauspiciousness (signified by such happenings as deaths, eclipses, the hooting of owls, etc.) is generally considered to be

[10] See chapter 2 below.

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beyond human control, the threat of contamination by impurity is seen to lie primarily in the manner in which a Pandit may be tempted to attend to the needs arising from his physical nature, from the fact of his being a sentient being (*jīva*). Hence the obsessive emphasis on the questioning attitude, the exercise of doubt (*śaṅkā*). The Pandit is a doubter because he is a believer. I have heard many Pandits say in good-humoured self-deprecation that their hesitations in relation to the pursuit of worldly pleasures are the result of doubt or uncertainty about the consequences of indulging the senses for one's higher pursuits. The Pandit is enjoined to exercise patience and restraint (*ced*), and to be ever prepared to resist the compulsions of bodily appetites until assured of their proper satisfaction as defined in *bhaṭṭil*. Thus, it is '*ced*' that marks one out as a Pandit: this is his obligation as also his privilege. Man is endowed with *citta* (moral consciousness) and must cultivate it to resolve his doubts, or else he will lose it and become *jaḍa* (one lacking in the capacity for discrimination) or even an *unamatta* (one distorted in intellect).

Their chequered history[11] has, however, taught the Pandits that there are exceptional circumstances when the need for compromise arises and one is constrained to violate the requirements of *bhaṭṭil*. As stated above, and elsewhere in detail (see Madan 1972), there are no Hindu artisan and service castes in rural Kashmir and the Pandits are obliged to accept the help of Muslims—not only of butchers, cobblers and cultivators but also of washermen, barbers, milkmen and others. Contact with Muslims is a threat to the Pandits' state of personal and domestic purity. Though the Pandits avoid intimate physical contact of all kinds with Muslims, indirect contact is either unavoidable (for example, the services of a barber or of the attendant at the cremation ground) or is tolerated (for example, acceptance of milk from a Muslim cowherd or having one's house cleaned by a Muslim servant). There is no solution to this problem and the Pandits say: '*yath na puś, tath na duś*', 'whereof one is helpless, thereof one is blameless'.

[11] Since the coming of Islam in the fourteenth century, Kashmiri Hindus have had to live off their wits and on compromises. It is remarkable that they should have survived at all. For an account of the vicissitudes through which they have passed see Bamzai (1962).

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The same is true of all unwitting breaches of proper conduct. Minor lapses, such as unavoidable physical contact with Muslims in certain situations, can be taken care of by the performance of routine corrective actions, such as washing of one's hands (*śuddhi*). In more serious cases (such as the inadvertent eating of strictly forbidden foods), one must perform *prāyaścitta* (a ritual of atonement), though I have never witnessed one. Purificatory rites are, however, quite common.

The questioning attitude (*śaṅkā*), the exercise of restraint (*ced*), and the cultivation of the moral consciousness (*citta*), then, provide the framework within which a Pandit has to order his life: thoughtful discrimination (*vicāra*) must be the basis of conduct (*ācāra*). The pursuit of *dharma* is not a call to an exercise in abstraction: it is in the everyday life of economic pursuits (*artha*) and bodily appetites (*kāma*) that *dharma* has to prevail. This is what *bhaṭṭil* is all about. In Dumont's terms, *dharma* must encompass *artha* and *kāma*.[12] This hierarchical balance of *puruṣārtha* can be achieved only in the life of the householder, which is, therefore, the most highly valued identity of a human being in the Pandit scheme of life and values.

The Pandits' attitude to worldly concerns and rewards is one of joyful acceptance. They do not seek immediate release (*mokṣa*) from them, in the present life, but try to accumulate merit for the future. *Karma* is the chain of bondage, but it is not for this reason alone unwelcome. What is important, many informants said, is the attitude of surrender to God (*śaraṇabhāva*) and the elimination of ego (*ahaṁkāra*). Here and now the Pandits strive for health, wealth and progeny, and pray for divine blessing in the fulfilment of these wishes. When a man kneels with folded hands before a priest to have his forehead marked with vermilion or saffron, the latter pronounces a blessing (in Sanskrit):

May you be long lived, may you be blessed with sons, may you be wealthy, may you be renowned, may you be wise, may you be greatly

[12] 'There are three "human ends", *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, duty, profit, and pleasure. All three are (necessary and) lawful, but they are so graded in a hierarchy that an inferior ideal may be pursued only as far as a superior one does not intervene: *dharma*, conformity to the world order, is more important than *artha*, power and wealth, which in turn is above *kāma*, immediate enjoyment' (Dumont 1960: 41).

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prosperous, may you be possessed with full faith in mercy and charity, may you be glorious, may you be one who lowers the pride of his enemies, may you be ingenious in trade, may you always be devoted to worshipping the feet of God, may you do good to all!

Similarly, a married woman receives her blessing: 'May you be blessed with money and sons, may you be devoted and faithful to your husband, may you always be dearly loved by your husband, may you be insightful, may you have correct understanding, may you live a hundred years!' Those who have their wishes fulfilled in good measure see in that the sign of previous good *karma* and also of divine grace: the two always go together.

The purposes of life are, then, well established in tradition. The emphasis is upon dharmic striving for worldly goals. 'Woman (*strī*) and wealth (*dhana*)', said an informant, 'are the means by which the householder is able to perform virtuous actions (*dharma-kāj*); but a man's undoing also are woman (as *kāminī*, that is, as the object of lust) and greed for gold (*kāncan*). It is, indeed, like walking on the razor's edge of which the seers (*ṛṣi*) have spoken.' Plenitude is to be rejoiced in, but only within the bounds defined in *bhaṭṭil*. To quote the same informant again, 'where indulgence is, *bhaṭṭil* is not'.

'*Bhaṭṭil*' : *traditional procedures*

The most comprehensive concept of social action is that of ordered conduct. It consists of such general notions as customs and conventions (*rīti*), procedures (*vidhi*) and daily routine (*niyam* or *nityakarma*). Then there are the specialized technical acts (*kriyā*) that help one to awaken one's dormant power (*śakti*), but these are only for the adepts. A very important component of such ordered conduct is the cycle of rituals (*saṁskāra*)—the so-called *rites de passage*—which must be performed in respect of each individual, in a prescribed sequence, beginning before birth and ending only after death. The proper locus for all these actions is the home, where 'the three fires of domestic life' burn: these are the fire in the hearth, the fire lit periodically to perform rituals, and 'the fire that is (or should be) always alight in one's own body (*deha*)—the fire of righteous actions'.

To mention the main life-cycle rituals, there are the child-

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hood rituals of purification (*kaha nethar*, performed on the eleventh day after birth), the feeding of the first solid meal (*annaprāśana*), the first tonsure (*zarakāsai*, for boys only), the piercing of earlobes (*kancombani*, nowadays for girls only), and the investiture of boys with the holy girdle (*mekhalā*) and the holy neck cord (*yajñopavīta*).[13] Marriage (*nethar*, that which cannot be changed or undone) is the principal *saṁskāra* of adult life. The ultimate rite is that of cremation (*dāhasaṁskāra*), which is followed by post-mortuary rites. The general purpose of these rituals is to invest the person with the ritual status of a Brahman, to enlarge the repertoire of the roles that men or women may perform while alive, and to ensure their well-being as manes after their death. This is the so-called process of maturation. Marriage stands out as the central ritual and social event in the life of every individual, enabling him or her to take on the highly valued role of a householder. In the performance of all these rituals, the householder is helped by his family priest, who is an adept in the procedures. In fact, his presence at these rituals is absolutely essential.

Saṁskāras are dramatic events which involve all or most adult members and also some children of a household in different roles. By contrast, the routine chores and rites of everyday life—the so-called *nityakarma*—are the abiding concerns of the individual Pandit and constitute an important and ever-present element of his *bhaṭṭil*. Limitations of space preclude a detailed account of these and I will mention only the main types of these activities. It is with the proper performance of ablutions (*śaucācāra*) and the offering of water for the satisfaction of the manes (*tarpaṇa*) that every day should begin. Prayers and offerings to gods and goddesses—especially to one's 'favourites', the *iṣṭadeva* or *iṣṭadevī*—may take place at home or at a sacred place outside, such as beside flowing water or in a

[13] What is called the *upanayana* ceremony elsewhere in north India is called *mekhalā*, or *yajñopavīta*, among the Pandits, and very great importance is attached to it both as a ritual and as a social event. It takes place usually in the seventh or ninth year of a boy's life. In all twenty-four rites are performed on the occasion, beginning with *bijavāpānam*, for ensuring the fertility of the parents of the boy, which may not have been performed, as it should have been, in the father's twenty-fifth and the mother's sixteenth year. All other rites, which should have been but may not have been performed, are also performed, culminating in the inves ure of the girdle (*mekhalā*) and the holy neck cord (*yajñopavīta*).

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temple. There is much individual and day-to-day variation in this regard. One may only read or recite from memory some sacred texts (such as the Shivamahimnastotram, in praise of Shiva, the Bhavanisahasranama, in praise of Devi, or the Bhagavad Gita)—this is called *pāṭh*; or one may also perform a ritual of adoration (*pūjā*) of the traditional iconic representations of Vishnu, Shiva and Devi, namely the *śālagrāma*, *liṅga* and *śrīyantra* respectively. *Nityakarma* also includes the observance of birth and death anniversaries (the *śrāddha* is of very great importance to the Pandits), the eating of proper foods cooked properly (though the Pandits do not observe vegetarianism, the dietary restrictions they observe are numerous), the discharge of social obligations (such as visiting kith and kin to offer felicitations or condolences), etc.

As in the case of *saṁskāra*, the concern in *nityakarma* is with the protection of one's personal moral and physical well-being and the establishment and maintenance of the right kinds of relationships between kith and kin, the living and the dead, and human beings and deities. The cycle of daily activities is assessed in the context of transmigration: does it add to the burden of the *karma* of previous lives or lighten it? The heavier the load of sins (*pāpa*), which alone could make the curses (*śāpa*) pronounced by others effective, the greater the chances of suffering as retribution. The Pandit view of life is moralistic: whatever the immediate agency that brings about good fortune or misfortune, ultimately it is the inexorable law of *karma* that is believed to govern human life. A person must not blame his woes on God, for, as an informant put it, 'God does not discriminate between human beings and hand out joy to some and sorrow to others.'

It is, therefore, imperative to follow the straight path of *dharma* in its various expressions. One can do nothing better about the future than mind the present, for it is the dialectic of the past and the present *karma* that determines one's future. The content of one's accumulated *karma* is, therefore, of utmost importance: there is scope for choices made in the light of a cultivated moral consciousness so that a person's actions may be such as to render him deserving of divine grace. It is in this sense that a person may aspire to be a 'doer' (*karmavān*), a moral agent. Otherwise, he remains tied to the wheel of

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karma interminably, 'born again, to die again, to be conceived once again'. A person attains release from his sins only very gradually through the performance of duties in full consciousness and in the attitude of submission to the divinity.[14] Meanwhile, one seeks selfless joy in the proper pursuit of the legitimate purposes of life. In the words of the nineteenth-century poet-saint, Parmananda, which have often been quoted and sung to me, 'let the performance of *karma* be firmly grounded in *dharma*: sow the seed of contentment (*santoṣa*) and reap the harvest of joy (*ānanda*)'.

ALTERNATIVE ORIENTATIONS

I have tried to show above that implicit in the Pandit ideology of *bhaṭṭil* is the belief that, while all sentient beings are subject to natural law ('they are born and they die'), human beings are additionally constrained by moral imperatives which are not, however, equally developed among all people. According to the Pandits, among the best of these moralities—if not the only one—is *bhaṭṭil*. As we have seen, *bhaṭṭil* finds its most elaborate expression in the life of the householder. This does not, however, mean that the Pandits do not recognize any alternatives to the householder's way of life: they acknowledge the virtue of *virakti* (detachment) or *sannyāsa* (renunciation), but notionally rather than in practice. It is, however, neither considered necessary nor a better path to become worthy of receiving divine blessing, nor is it, in fact, a commonly chosen way of life. More about this below. What must be emphasized here is that the Pandits maintain that good *karma* and divine grace, rather than austerity, are what matter ultimately.

Bhakti

The Pandit is content to live the life of a householder and seek virtue and salvation through doing so properly. The

[14] Cf. 'The knowledge of the Absolute, *parā vidyā*, which secures immediate liberation (*sadyo-mukti*) is possible only for those who are able to withdraw their thoughts from worldly objects and concentrate on the ultimate fact of the universe. The knowledge of Īśvara (the Supreme as God), *aparā vidyā*, puts one on the pathway that leads to deliverance eventually (*krama-mukti*). The worshipping soul gradually acquires the higher wisdom which results in the consciousness of the identity with the Supreme' (Radhakrishnan 1953: 579).

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householder's life is, as we have seen, defined (that is, bounded) by moral imperatives and procedures of various kinds. The danger of lapses and the fear of their consequences is, therefore, always present. Hence the Pandit notions of *gārhasthya* as an ordeal (*tapa*) and the supreme sacrifice (*mahāyajña*). The only way to lighten this burdensomeness of *bhaṭṭil*, the Pandits say, is through *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is a complex notion involving love of, and deep devotion to, the divinity and the seeking of refuge through the abolition of egotism.

Bhakti is not an alternative way of life but a particular orientation of the householder's life, 'away from the love of the world towards the love of God'. The Pandits consider *bhakti* as a value in itself. 'Filling one's self with the love of divinity', 'like a vessel may be filled with nectar', is an act which is its own reward. Of course, if the divinity grants it, the devotee (*bhakta*) will be bestowed with the capacity for right thought and conduct and thus liberated. The expression used for liberation in this context is '*moklāvun*', which literally means 'terminating' or 'freeing', the reference being to the ending of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Such is the nature of divine blessing (*anugraha*). The Pandits say that the special characteristic of *kaliyuga* among the four aeons of cosmic time is that a devotee does not have to engage in severe and long drawn-out austerities (*tapasyā*) to win divine favour. They maintain that 'if the devotee's heart breaks from the pangs of separation from the divinity for just as long as a hailstone will stay on the tip of a bull's horn', divine grace will be assured. But such is the wickedness of human beings in the *kaliyuga* that only rarely is one so filled with love of God as to become a fit receptacle for divine favour, which is thus hard to obtain (*durlabha*) rather than easy (*sulabha*).[15] But a person must not give up endeavour and prayer. Dumont has called *bhakti* 'a

[15] Cf.: 'Viewed from man's side, Ramanuja holds, the attainment of God is anything but easy, for it implies the very difficult achievement of perfectly disciplined meditation on God. Even more important is the fact that this intimate communion with God is not something that man can gain: not even the advanced devotee who yearns desperately for this communion can gain it by his own effort. Salvation is God's election and God's gift' (Carman 1974: 85).

The emergence of strong Vaishnava influences among the Shaivite Kashmiri Brahmans is another important development in the cultural history of Kashmir that awaits careful research.

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revolutionary doctrine since it transcends both caste and renunciation, and opens for all without distinction an easy road to salvation' (1960: 57). It is interesting to note how the Pandits have retained the idea of *bhakti* as an 'easy road' and yet managed to emphasize that it is hard to reach and tread it. Failure is necessarily that of the seeker, not of the 'path'.

Now, the longing for divine love and grace does not require one to abandon one's family and become a renouncer. It so transforms and enlarges one's affections as to make them all partake of divine love. The love of God is not exclusive and does not require withdrawal. As many informants put it, '*bhakti* does not drain the heart but fills it evermore with love'. That is, *bhakti* requires that the love of one's kith and kin should be encompassed by and not independent of the love of God. The devotee does not fall into the snare of rituals either, for divine love is an attitude of life. Rituals have their place in a person's life, for they help to maintain *bhaṭṭil*, but rituals are only a means to the end. The devotee learns to be detached in the midst of involvement, concentrating on the only true attachment, that to the divinity. He knows himself to be alone or isolated (*keval*), though he has a family, and seeks perfection through union with the unique (*kaivalya*), that is, the divinity. His attitude is one of utter humility and submission to God. In the course of my fieldwork I have met a few people of whom others said that they were men of God and led 'pure lives', though they were householders with wives and children.[16]

Śakti

Kashmir has another celebrated tradition, namely that of the quest for inner illumination (*prakāśa*) through the pursuit of occult power (*śakti*) (see, e.g., Woodroffe 1978). This is the domain of *tantra*, a body of sophisticated technical knowledge, and ordinary householders of the kind I have worked with

[16] There is a category of exceptional people who should be mentioned here. To all intents and purposes they are mad or deranged and found among the Pandits as well as the Muslims. The Kashmiris, however, consider them as people 'touched by God' (to quote an informant), for they are said to be clairvoyant and gifted with the capacity to bless and curse. They do not acknowledge family ties or observe the rules of social intercourse. It is interesting how such persons, irrespective of their Pandit or Muslim birth, serve as a link between the two communities.

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have only vague or confused ideas about it. Over the years I have met only one Pandit who described himself to me as a novitiate *śākta* (one in pursuit of *śakti*), but have been told of a few others, dead or alive, who were or are adepts.

According to popular belief, the *śākta* seeks, through *kriyā*—consisting of study, discussion, reflection, ritual and yoga—the arousal of *śakti*, which resides in every human being, but lies dormant, coiled like a somnolent snake (*kuṇḍalinī*) at the bottom of the spine. It can be aroused, however, and raised to the head and enable the seeker to realize his own divinity, his oneness with Shiva. I have heard stories of the miraculous powers of the *śākta*, of how they can even control the processes of nature, such as seasons and earthquakes. I have also been told that the ordinary rules of *bhaṭṭil* do not bind a *śākta*; thus he may eat meat in places and on occasions when the ordinary Pandit dare not do so and also transgress other norms of the householder's life. Though some tantric texts speak of the *pañcatattva* (the sacramental consumption of mutton, fish and alcohol, sexual intercourse, and the employment of bodily postures) for the attainment of *śakti*, my informants denied that sexuality had any special place whatsoever in a *śākta*'s life.

According to my informants, there can be no personal family for a *śākta* but he may live in an exclusive household of his own, consisting of his family members. Preferably he may live with his preceptor (*guru*) and fellow-seekers, and at a later stage have his own disciples (*śiṣya*) to minister to his needs. One of these may be adopted as a son so that funeral and post-mortuary rites can be performed. The *śākta* is thus not exactly a man without a household, though he is different from ordinary householders. His way of life is certainly more than a mere re-orientation: it is an alternative way of life, though defined in relation to a householder. In fact, most of his disciples are householders who seek light from him and his blessings, without themselves abandoning their families and other worldly pursuits. The *śākta* looms on the horizon of the Pandit's cultural universe. That the Brahmans of Kashmir were once renowned Shaivites and Shaktins who made outstanding contributions to the philosophy and practice of *tantra* is now only a very dim memory in the lives of the villagers I have lived with.

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Virakti

I have mentioned above the Pandit attitude to renunciation. In the course of my inquiries I encountered no renouncers, strictly defined, among the Pandits: such sannyasis as one does encounter in Kashmir are usually non-Kashmiris. Some individuals, mostly men, may live away from home but they do not go through formal initiation into any sannyasi order. There is also no emphasis at all upon the termination of the *gṛhastha āśrama* (the stage of the householder) in one's life. As a person grows older, he is expected to become increasingly God-centred, but no one is expected to live away from home. In this sense, formal renunciation is not merely postponed, as Dumont (1960: 45) points out, but its place in the life of the Pandit is denied. There are only two stages of life: that of the child who lives with his parents, and that of the adult who has his children living with him. Both stages are phases in the life of the householder. The *gṛhastha* sustains the world: to recall, he is the *duniyā-dār*.[17] If he succeeds in cultivating detachment from the passions (*virakti*), that should be enough but even that is not easy.

The attitude of Pandits towards those who make claims of detachment, and particularly of renunciation, is generally one of scepticism. Individual men and women may command respect, and even a following, but most of them are dismissed as charlatans. The general term of reference for such persons is *sādh* (from the Sanskrit *sādhu*) and it is related to and rhymed with *bād*, flatus (from the Persian word for air), in lighthearted banter. In a similar vein, an old saying warns the Pandit against the company of renouncers as they will make him give up his wife (and household) and never make him privy to their esoteric secrets!

In view of their almost total absence among them, why is it that the Pandits distrust and ridicule self-styled renouncers? I do not think that the answer lies in the Pandits' having a higher standard than other Hindu communities by which to judge such claims; it lies rather in their commitment to the

[17] Cf. Manusmriti (III.78): 'Because men of the three other orders are daily supported by the householder with (gifts of) sacred knowledge and food, therefore, (the order of) householders is the most excellent order' (Bühler 1964: 89).

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ideology of the householder. Apparently they are cynical about those who leave home because most such people never had families of their own (either because they were unable to get married or because they became widowed before becoming fathers) or their relations with their kin have been strained.

At a deeper level, however, one might detect a fear of the renouncer, for he poses a threat to the ideology of the householder and plenitude. Unlike the former, he not only seeks release from the web of kinship and other worldly ties but also denigrates these as a trap and an illusion. The renouncer is too powerful an adversary to be contemplated with equanimity. Individual renouncers are usually accorded respect in face-to-face encounters; they are fed and offered gifts. When talking about them generally, however, they are ridiculed and even reviled and their genuineness is generally doubted. Dumont (1960: 45) is quite right in speaking of 'subdued hostility' towards renunciation. In fact, the Pandits reduce the renouncer to a caricature of his ideal self; that the caricature is only too often an accurate enough portrait of the 'holy men' one actually meets is another matter but not totally irrelevant. The real point seems to be that only when the renouncer is thus portrayed may he be convincingly employed as a foil to highlight the virtues of the life of the householder: these are said to flow from 'detachment in enjoyment' which is the essence of renunciation.[18] An informant once went into the details of the way of life of the mythological Janaka to emphasize that Janaka was not only the *king* of Mithila but also a great *householder*, and, at the same time, the supreme *renouncer*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Pandits' ideology of the householder is, in fact, much more than just that: it is their ideology of humanity. While all sentient beings are born (and die), human beings are 'made' or

[18] At a Pandit wedding I observed in 1983 (after this essay had been first published), the priest explained to the bridegroom the significance of the *kanyādāna* thus: 'The maiden is gifted to you by her father for the purpose of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. Now, *dharma* is not putting the *tyok* mark on one's forehead: it consists of discharging one's debts to gods, gurus, and ancestors. *Artha* is the making of money and *kāma* the pursuit of luxuries (sic). The ideal is not renunciation but

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constructed through the *saṁskāra* and achieve different degrees of perfection by their conduct. A boy attains the full ritual and moral status of a Pandit when he receives the girdle and the holy neck cord. In the case of girls, it is marriage which bestows such status. Marriage is crucial for men as well as women, for then alone do they become true householders. Bachelors, widowers and widows are members of households but not *gṛhastha* themselves and are, therefore, regarded as unfortunate. The greatest ambition of a male Pandit is to become a householder along with his own wife and children.

Children and women

The ideology is, however, almost silent on children and women: they come in only indirectly—in relation to men. This is, perhaps, partly because as a man I have not had the same free access to women informants in the course of my fieldwork as to men, but the main reason lies deeper—in the ideology itself, in Pandit culture. As I have described elsewhere (1965), the Pandits greatly desire and value children, particularly sons. In fact, to be a *gṛhastha* is to be a parent and this is why the bachelor and the childless widow are pitied much more than a widower or a widow who does have children. Children, of course, have a most important place in the emotional lives of adults but they acquire a structural significance only when they themselves become adults. In fact, it is not children or adults who are important but *bhaṭṭil*.

Children acquire the Pandit identity initially by the fact of being born to Pandit parents. Their conduct is regulated under the guidance of adults till they are sufficiently grown up to act independently. Many concessions are made in their favour and lapses from proper conduct condoned, but once a boy has gone through his ritual initiation, and a girl has been married, the full range of the expectations and constraints that constitute *bhaṭṭil* becomes applicable. Prior to these events boys and girls do not have the ritual status of adults. This fact is dramatized in their being neither entitled to full cremation rites and

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householdership. Having done all this one must seek refuge in God: that is *mokṣa*.' I later checked the text of the marriage ritual (according to Laugākṣa) that the priest had been following: it did not mention *mokṣa* at all.

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post-mortuary food offerings, nor susceptible to ritual pollution by births and deaths in the circle of kinsfolk. The absence of children in the ideology is, therefore, not an absence at all: it is an anticipation of adulthood. The child is the adult in making.

The absence of a well-articulated place for women in the ideology is a more complex matter and calls for clarification, particularly because every Pandit woman is a married householder and even the idea of a woman renouncer is absent.[19] There is a sense in which the Pandit women—they are called *Bhaṭṭani*—are a 'muted group' seen in the light of a dominant male system of perception (Ardener 1977). The men recognize that in the reality of everyday life women are very important: 'What is a home without the *gharavājin* (mistress)?' they ask.[20] A married woman is also called a '*gṛhasthadārin*', the bearer of the burden of *gārhasthya*. A man works out his destiny as a human being and a Pandit in the company of the domestic 'others' who include women, notably his mother and wife. In his ritual performances—a major *pūjā*, a life cycle ritual, a *śrāddha*—the presence of the wife is essential.

If all this be so, why do women remain 'muted' in the ideology? An answer to this question formulated by my male informants was that *bhaṭṭil* is as much a concern of women as it is of men, but in the domain of domestic activity, women's work is in the kitchen—which is their specific responsibility—and their participation in rituals is moderately or severely restricted during the duration of menstruation. A menstruating woman must particularly exclude herself completely from rituals for the dead or else they lose all their efficacy. Similarly, a woman polluted by menses may not enter the *pūjā* room in the house or a temple and in no case make offerings to the deities. She may, however, say her prayers and even circumambulate a sacred place.

[19] There is, of course, the celebrated fourteenth century Shaivite mystic Lalla (or Lal Ded) who abandoned home and became a wanderer and whose sayings (*vākya*) are a living part of the Pandit oral tradition. She, however, represents the proverbial exception that proves the rule, for Lalla was no ordinary woman (see Kaul 1973).

[20] Cf. Rig Veda III.53.4: 'the wife herself is the home'.

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Apart from the limitation which is seen to arise from the physical–moral nature (*zāt*) of the women, there are other conventions which establish the superiority of men. Thus a woman does not offer water or food to manes; she does not have the authority to invest her son with the girdle and the holy neck cord: if his father is not available, the proper surrogate for the absentee parent is an agnatic kinsman; nor, indeed, does a woman give her daughter away in marriage. And yet (as stated above) she is present by her husband's side on all such major occasions: she is defined in relation to him. It is a hierarchical relation and proclaims their unity which is, however, complex in the sense that man encompasses and is superior to woman.

The most concrete expression of the foregoing fact is that, from the day of his marriage, a man wears a holy neck cord of six instead of three strands of cotton, each set of three symbolizing his responsibility to discharge the debts (*ṛṇa*) towards gods, gurus and ancestors—one on his own behalf and the the other on behalf of his wife. But as Dumont (on whose work the foregoing formulation is based) has rightly pointed out,

> The same hierarchical principle that in some way subordinates one level to another at the same time introduces a multiplicity of levels, letting the situation reverse itself. The mother of the family (an Indian family, for example) inferior though she may be made by her sex [I would like to say sex *and* gender or physiology *and* ideology] in some respects nonetheless dominates the relationships within the family (1980: 241).

In short, the ideology places different values on men and women and thus generates an idiom which includes reference to women when men are spoken of. The relative position of men and women is given in their relationship. Needless to add, the reality of everyday life does not wholly follow the ideology in its full detail: to assert this would amount to suggesting the false and suppressing the ethnographic truth.

The man-in-the-world

The ideology of everyday life, then, clearly establishes the Pandit as the *gṛhastha*. The householder is the man-in-world.

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The house he lives in is, in fact, the microcosm of the earth and its presiding deity (*gharadevatā*) is none other than Vastoshpati, the protector of the earth. Such a person's prime concern is with the maturation of his self (person), which is ensured if he organizes his life in strict conformity with traditional purposes, employing appropriate procedures for their achievement. Release from the chain of transmigration is frankly admitted to be a very distant goal, and, therefore, one concentrates in the meanwhile on the slow but steady accumulation of merit by the conscious effort to lead a disciplined life.

As a householder, a Pandit may legitimately seek plenitude and joy but only if this endeavour is controlled by *dharma*. As a sensitive informant once put it to me, 'to lead the life of a householder is like seeking to warm oneself by fire—one might also get burnt by it'. In other words, while the life of the householder is the source of joy, it also brings sorrow and, if one deviates from the path of *dharma*, it could also lead the way to perdition. To quote further from the same informant: 'The home is the place neither for the indulgence of one's physical appetites (*bhogaśālā*) nor for the performance of austerities (*yogaśālā*).' It is the narrow middle ground, the 'razor's edge': 'Like the sharp edge of a razor is the path, narrow and difficult to tread' (Katha Upanishad I.iii.14).

The Pandit seeks meritorious fulfilment in life through the affirmation of family and wider kinship obligations and through the willing acceptance of other social bonds which result from the pursuits of generally accepted worldly goals (*artha*). These bonds include his relations with the non-Pandits also. He wants success in the work he does, and cares for being thought of well in his village as much as he wants to lead a happy domestic life. There is thus a continuity in the Pandit's life between the domestic and the extra-domestic domains and between what may be called the religious and secular spheres, just as there is a continuity between the home and the earth itself.

Bhaṭṭil is a total view of life which excludes nothing but it is a hierarchical view of both the ultimate purposes of life and the tasks of everyday existence. Discrimination rather than withdrawal is the watchword of the Pandit's life. He is, however, expected to remain always mindful that there is some-

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thing higher than good *karma* and this is divine grace. The path of occult power or renunciation is for the selected few. For the common Pandit, the life of the man-in-the-world—epitomized in the role of the householder—though arduous, is the moral and good life. It is a life worth living.[21]

[21] After this book had gone to the printer, I came across an essay on Kashmiri Brahmans based on Sanskrit texts of the medieval period (9th–13th centuries). What I find remarkable are the continuities between the ideas of those times and of the present-day Pandits, the intervening centuries and the disruptions resulting from the Muslim incursion notwithstanding. Thus, we read: 'The Brahmanism of the middle ground . . . offered the Brahman householder a monism for the ritual agent which admitted renunciation but tended to confine it to the last quarter of a man's life (after the payment of the three debts), and at the same time made it an unnecessary option by propagating a doctrine of gnostic liberation within the pursuit of conformity to the householder's dharma' (Sanderson 1985: 197). The householder 'was to perfect himself through disinterested conformity to God's will manifest as his dharma' (ibid.: 198).

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2

AUSPICIOUSNESS AND PURITY

> There are many auspicious and inauspicious moments in one's life, just as there are in a day. The most auspicious moment of the day is the rising of the sun. It fills the earth, the sky and the heavens with light and brings with it the promise of good works and wisdom for men. It is like the birth of a son—the most auspicious moment in a man's life—but while childbirth pollutes the very same people, namely the parents, whom it makes most happy, sunrise manifests the glory of God, enlivens our intelligence, and purifies the whole earth.
>
> A KASHMIRI PANDIT

INTRODUCTORY

During the last three decades or so the sociology of South Asian societies has been characterized by a deepening concern with the people's categories of thought over and above the attention that has long been given to the study of social organization. This is a welcome development inasmuch as people everywhere not only engage in social behaviour but also have *ideas* about the motivations and justifications of their actions. In other words, what they do is meaningful to themselves and it is only proper that the sociologist should concern himself equally with rule-governed behaviour *and* with its significance to the actors.

Thus, the work of many scholars, including Louis Dumont and M. N. Srinivas, has contributed significantly to the examination of certain ideas underlying characteristic forms of behaviour in Hindu society, notably the ideas of 'purity' and 'pollution'. There are other cognitive structures which await exploration in the context of the inter-relatedness of ideology and actual behaviour. In recent years the notion of 'auspiciousness' in the senses of benediction and well-being, enveloping

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the everyday life of ordinary people at the one end and of extraordinary personages such as the king at the other, has emerged as one such concern of central importance in the study of Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina cultures (see, for example, Carman and Marglin 1985). In fact, in traditional Indian thought one of the auspicious events in the life of common people was the sight of the king—so much so, indeed, that the later Muslim kings of India, the great Moghuls, yielded to the popular demand of blessing people by allowing themselves to be seen by morning crowds gathered outside the royal fort, even though this was against the spirit of Islam.

In this chapter I am concerned with an attempt to clarify the notion of 'auspiciousness' and to examine its relation to 'purity' by exploring some of their meanings in Hindu or, more precisely, Brahmanical culture.[1] The published ethnographic studies on 'auspiciousness' are by no means as rich as those on 'purity' and they are certainly less clear even than those on the latter subject. The present exercise is, therefore (to borrow T. S. Eliot's words), 'a raid on the inarticulate' and that too 'with shabby equipment'. I make the attempt, nevertheless; while doing so I use deliberately, but only as far as seems reasonable, the Sanskrit words *śubha* and *śuddha* instead of 'aus-

[1] R. S. Khare has raised the question as to whether the idea of auspiciousness is, like ritual purity, 'a monopoly of the twice-born' (1976a: 121n). Louis Dumont in a comment on an earlier draft of the present essay wrote that the Kallar of Tamilnadu, the subcaste of which he made an intensive study, are little concerned with astrological matters; he suggested that auspiciousness is a brahmanical idea, implying that it is not of the same general importance as purity and pollution. G. S. Bhatt, who has devoted many years to the study of Scheduled Castes, such as the Chamar in Uttar Pradesh, informs me that low castes do have beliefs regarding auspiciousness/inauspiciousness and consult astrologers on such matters as the performance of life-cycle rituals. This perhaps points to the deeper inroads of the ideas and behaviour of upper castes in the lives of lower castes in north India than in south India.

Bh. Krishnamurthy, who also read an earlier draft of this essay, writes (in a personal communication): 'Most of the practices and beliefs described in the article have counterparts in the Dravidian languages area. It would be interesting to sort out how many of these had their origin in the native (folk) cultures of India cutting across the caste system and how many are prevalent only in the higher castes. I am thinking of, for example, *śubhanakṣtra*, which is a part of the religious observances of upper castes as opposed to *śubha śakuna*, which is prevalent in many communities including tribals.' It is obvious that we need more ethnographic data on this subject than we have now to answer these (and other) questions.

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piciousness' and 'purity'. The former two words or derivatives from the same are in use in most languages of India. My hesitation in using the two English words throughout the chapter arises from the fact that they have become omnibus words and conceal more than they reveal, and this might vitiate my attempt to clarify the significance of the Hindu concepts under consideration.[2] Moreover, and more importantly, my approach to the problem makes it imperative that words actually employed in everyday speech be examined in the context of their use. Without entering into philosophical controversies or invoking the technical literature on semantics, I would like to maintain that we can learn a great deal about the meaning or meanings of a family of words by examining them in the contexts of other meanings (which is what 'use' really is). It seems to me permissible to do so for my limited purpose without going into the question of whether abstract meanings exist or not.

ON THE CATEGORIES OF 'ŚUBHA' AND 'ŚUDDHA': NOTES ON EVERYDAY USAGE[3]

The everyday (ordinary language) use of the word *śubha* refers most frequently and directly to time and to temporal events in

[2] To elaborate this point, the Fathers at the Delhi Jesuit seminary Vidyajyoti assured me during a discussion (in 1980) that the word 'auspiciousness' has no standard use in their language other than in reference to the 'superstitions' of pre-Christian European peoples and of non-Christians generally. No comment is necessary. As for 'purity', I know from my fieldwork in the Kashmir Valley that the brahmanical notion of *śuddha* and the Muslim idea of *pāk*, both rendered into English as 'pure' or 'purity', for no other appropriate words seem to be available, differ significantly in their connotation. Thus, *pāk* cooked food of the Muslim is totally unacceptable to the Brahman because it is incurably polluting. Similarly, no good Muslim eats food which has come out of a Hindu kitchen; it is simply *harām*, forbidden.

A disclaimer is perhaps called for immediately, lest I should be misunderstood to be retreating behind a curtain of Sanskrit words (or words from other Indian languages) into a naïve cultural relativism. I remember Goethe's admonition that, so long as we know no foreign language, we are in a sense ignorant of our own. Comparison is, indeed, the foundation on which anthropology—our knowledge, understanding and evaluation of human cultures through mutual interpretation—is based. In short, all I am trying to do is to argue that direct (surface) translation from one language to another, far from contributing to our general understanding of cultural constructs, in fact often hinders them.

[3] The data for this paper are drawn from the following main sources: (i) My

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relation to particular categories of people. Thus the word *śubha* —or its opposite *aśubha*—is prefixed to nouns such as *samaya* or *kāla* (time) for the performance of a particular significant act which is a joyous event in itself or is expected to have happy consequences. A time which may be considered auspicious for one kind of actions may not, however, be so for another: while the night is auspicious for the worship of Mahakali, it is not so for the worship of Vishnu. Similarly, *śubha* is used along with such words as *avasara* (occasion), *utsava* (festival), *ṛtu* (season), *māsa* (month), *divasa* (day), *ghaḍi* and *kṣaṇa* (a moment or measure of time). More specifically, *śubha* qualifies *muhūrta* (astrologically appropriate moment for doing something significant) and *lagna* (the moment of the sun's entry into a zodiacal space or sign). Contextually, people speak of *ārambha* (beginning), *anta* (ending), *samāpana* (completion), *āgamana* (coming), *gamana* (going), *yātrā* (pilgrimage), etc. as *śubha*, invoking benediction by doing so. *Śubha* is also employed to refer to happy events (for example, *janma*, birth, or *vivāha*, marriage) and information about them (*sūcanā*, *samācāra*), to signs (*saṅketa*), omens (*śakuna*), etc. *Śubhakārya* and *śubhācāra* respectively refer to any specific act or conduct generally which is conducive to well-being. To ensure such well-being through success and happy consequences in any kind of work, ranging from the routine to the extraordinary, people consult astrologers, priests or almanacs to find out the auspicious moment or time for—to give a few examples—wearing a new garment, buying provisions, starting on a journey, or performing a ritual. Negatively, when unfortunate events which it is feared might occur do not occur or, having occurred, do not result in major misfortune, auspiciousness is said to have prevailed. The agency which ensures this well-being may be divine grace, the configuration of circumstances and/or human effort.

In all the foregoing uses of the prefix *śubha*, the focus is on the directional flow of time—on temporal sequences and critical points in them—rather than on time as such. The passage of

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efforts, now extended over many years, to interpret various aspects of the way of life of Kashmiri Brahmans by interrogation and observation (including field-work in a village); (ii) recent conversations with several Uttar Pradeshi (Chaturvedi, Kanyakubja and Saryupari) Brahmans of Kanpur and Lucknow on the specific theme of this paper; (iii) a few selected ethnographic works.

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time becomes significant through the conjunction or intersection of the trajectories of human lives and/or of such trajectories and the course of cosmic forces.

The evidence of everyday speech indicates that the notion of auspiciousness is also associated with places, objects and persons connected with the kind of events or actions mentioned above. An altar set up or a place marked out for a ritual performance is called a *śubha-sthali* or *sthāna*. Once the ceremony is over the altar may be demolished and the sacred area earlier set apart reverts to its daily routine uses. The kitchen (*cauka*) and the room reserved for daily worship (*pūjā-kakṣa*) are particularly auspicious places in a house so long as it is inhabited. A celestial *śubha* space which is much talked about is the *nakṣatra* (a constellation through which the moon passes at a particular time: a lunar mansion). Certain directions (*diśā*) and cardinal points in space are also regarded as *śubha* or *aśubha*. Thus, facing the east while performing a ritual is regarded as desirable through its association with sunrise, and facing the south is regarded as undesirable through its association with death.

A *tīrthasthāna*, or place of pilgrimage, located on the bank of a river or a body of water, is regarded as holy and a pilgrimage (*yātrā*) to it is auspicious. The holiness of the place and the auspiciousness of the visit are greatly enhanced if two or more rivers merge there: it is then elevated to the status of *saṅgama*, that is, the place from where two or more streams flow together.[4] One of India's most holy place of pilgrimage—the *tīrtharāja*, or the king of places of pilgrimage—is Prayag (in Uttar Pradesh) where the holy rivers Ganga and Yamuna and the subterranean Sarasvati meet and where the famous twelve-yearly bathing festival of *kumbha* is held whenever a particular astrological conjunction (*yoga*), namely Jupiter in aries, occurs. The focus is on movement, which is what *yātrā* denotes, and on 'crossing over', or 'reaching forward', from a less to a more desirable state of being, achieved by a ritual bathing in the holy waters, which is what *tīrtha* signifies: in the words of a Kashmiri Brahman informant, 'more than the impurities of

[4] It is worth noting here that one of the secondary meanings of the word *saṅgama* is sexual union, which is thus regarded as being comparable to the merger of rivers and is similarly auspicious.

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the outer body (*tana*), it is the impurities of the mind (*mana*) that are thus washed away'. As in the case of time, it is not a place as such but what can possibly happen there to certain categories of people that marks it out as auspicious: we are once again confronted with the notion of intersection of the trajectories of cosmic forces, symbolized by moving planets and flowing rivers, and human lives.

Besides points in time and space, certain objects also are considered auspicious. The most notable example is the *kalaśa*, a metal (gold, silver, copper or brass) or earthen vessel containing water from a river (or rivers) and other auspicious substances such as dry fruits.[5] The Kashmiri Brahmans treat it as a representation of Ganesha, the deity who removes obstacles (*vighnahartā*) and bestows success on the works of human beings (*siddhidātā*) and thus symbolizes auspiciousness. The *kalaśa* is associated with the *commencement* of a ritual, when it is consecrated and worshipped, and with its *completion* when its contents are distributed by sprinkling worshippers with the water and, to cite the practice of Kashmiri Brahmans again, offering them the walnuts, earlier placed in the vessel, to eat: doing so is considered to be conducive to well-being.

The adjective *śubha* is applied in everyday speech to actors (*kartā*) when they are seen performing actions which are conducive to joy and well-being (*śubhakārya*) or when they symbolize these states. For instance, and crucially, a *śubhacintaka* (well-wisher) is one who entertains good thoughts about another's influence on the course of the latter's life. One who conveys good news is called *śubhasūcanī*. A specific usage among the upper castes in the Hindi-speech areas worth mentioning here is the reference to prostitutes as *maṅgalamukhī*, that is, one whose face produces well-being when seen. The distinction between the state of auspiciousness and the creative agent (*maṅgalakāraka* or *kalyāṇakāraka*) is most important, as is the relation between

[5] As is well known to students of classical texts, the contents of the *kalaśa* vary with the occasion. Thus, the contents of the vessel at the coronation ceremony of Hindu kings included the water of many rivers, earth from many places and dwellings, jewels, medicinal herbs, etc. 'The *pūrṇa kumbha* (*kalaśa*, *ghaṭa*) is, minimally, a pot filled with water, with green leaves from fruit-bearing trees, especially mango leaves, covering its mouth, and a coconut placed on top. The pot, placed on white raw rice, is the most widely used sign of auspiciousness (*maṅgala*, *śubha*)' (Marglin 1982: 161).

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the two (the signification). The point to note about these usages and similar others is that it is not the person himself or herself who is auspicious, but rather his or her intentions, actions, or even merely the presence (and witnessing the same), which are so and are, therefore, expected to have happy consequences. The ultimate source of auspiciousness is, of course, the divinity (cf. Carman 1974: 172, 255).

A crucial contribution to the explication of the significance of the category *śubha* comes from the speech of priests and astrologers, which is an element in the conversation of those who consult these specialists. Such people believe that their lives are subject to the influence of the nine *grahas*, headed by *sūrya* (Sun) and including *bṛhaspati*, *budha*, *candramā*, *ketu*, *maṅgala*, *rāhu*, *śanaiścara* and *śukra* (corresponding to Jupiter, Mercury, Moon, Dragon's Tail, Mars, Dragon's Head, Saturn and Venus). These *grahas* are classified into two categories, namely *śubha* (beneficent) and *aśubha* or *krūra* (cruel, fierce, formidable, maleficent). Only three of these—*bṛhaspati*, *candramā*, *śukra*—were described to me by my Kashmiri Brahman informants as being *śubha*; *budha* is considered 'impotent' or neutral and the rest fierce. It does not, however, really matter very much to a human being what the nature of a *graha* is, except in so far as any one of them, or any combination of them (*yoga*), comes to have a dominant influence on the course of his life trajectory as a result of the aspect of these heavenly beings. This fact of astral influence is called *daśā*, that is the condition and fate of a human being as affected by the movement of a *graha*. These planetary movements affect the lives of people variously, depending primarily upon the time (*kāla*) and place (*sthāna*) of their birth. Thus even a maleficent *graha* may bring joy, health and prosperity to an individual owing to its location in a particular place (*gṛha*) in his birth-time horoscope (*janmakuṇḍalī*) and/or the horoscope for the year (*varṣakuṇḍalī*) and the relation of this location to the *graha*'s own position during a particular period of time; zodiacal spaces are classified in respect of each *graha* as his own, his friends' or his enemies' 'homes'. In this regard, the critical datum of every individual horoscope is the *lagna*, that is, the zodiacal sign under which one is born: starting from there, the life trajectory of the individual can be charted, which is what the casting or writing of a horoscope

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involves. The auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of a life trajectory is stated in degrees rather than in absolute terms. An individual is thus conceptualized as a *pātra* ('vessel') to be filled.

Now, childbirth, particularly the birth of a son, is normally an auspicious event, but it may not always be so. The configuration of *graha* and *nakṣatra* at the time of his birth may make a particular son a menace to the well-being of his parents and, therefore, his birth is considered to be an inauspicious event. In other words, the influence of his life trajectory on those of his parents may turn out to be maleficent, reinforcing the unfortunate elements of their own trajectories and weakening the beneficent ones. For example, a boy born on the *mūla nakṣatra* to a Kashmiri Brahman family is adjudged to be a potential parricide, not of course by a wilful act of future murder but by virtue of the subtle influence of one life's trajectory on the other. Nobody else would accept such a child in adoption. To avert the mortal threat, he may be abandoned near the entrance of a temple, or some such holy place, thus being entrusted to the care of gods. In fact, this act may be seen as one of symbolic destruction. The family priest then picks up the child—the whole act is of course pre-arranged—and exchanges him for money and grain with the child's own family with a member of which he has a 'chance' encounter.

Such happenings are not common, but Hindus generally perform rituals regularly in an effort to ward off or at least minimize the dangers posed by inauspicious births or unfavourable *daśā*. These rituals are called *upāya* or 'corrective' actions. The most notable of these rituals that has come to my notice is *tulābhāra*, when the body of the endangered person is symbolically replaced by weighing him against grain, pulses and other prescribed substances which are then given away to the family priest.[6] The body is reconstituted by means of a ritual bath, which involves its being washed with clays, herbs, water, etc.

[6] The fact that priests accept 'ominous children' and 'dangerous goods' from their patrons (*yajamāna*) testifies to the belief in their superior capacity to cope with dangerous situations. They thus come to symbolize danger itself. At the same time there is, at least among Kashmiri Brahmans, a barely concealed deprecation of priests for the same reasons and, hence, a sense of inauspiciousness is aroused on encountering them on particular occasions (when, for instance, their services are not required).

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from various places. Expectedly, the whole series of rites is regarded as highly hazardous to the subject, though their purpose is to stave off the ultimate danger of death.

The extent to which such rituals succeed in warding off evil is not wholly predictable, for auspiciousness can neither be totally engineered nor inauspiciousness wholly averted, no matter what promotive or corrective steps may be taken. It was pointed out to me by a Chaturvedi Brahman informant that, though the marriage of Rama was performed at an auspicious time and the appointed time for his consecration as the king was similarly calculated, his married life was interrupted (because of the abduction of Sita by Ravana) and finally ended in sorrow (when Sita immolated herself); similarly his becoming king was postponed by his fourteen years' exile.

Birth is normally a *śubha* event and death is *aśubha*. Yet the degree and nature of inauspiciousness of death also are determined by the time and place at which it occurs and by other related circumstances. There is a recurrent inauspicious period in every month of the lunar calendar called *pañcaka*, when five *nakṣatras* are in conjunction, for the duration of which the performance of many actions is forbidden as far as possible. The cremation of a dead body during *pañcaka* is considered very unfortunate but cannot be avoided. It was explained to me that the occurrence of death during such a period is replete with dangers for the journey of the dead or departed person (*preta*) into *pitṛloka* (the abode of the manes) and is also inauspicious for the survivors, five of whom may die in the ensuing year.

Death is inauspicious, but widowhood is an even more unfortunate event for an upper caste Hindu woman. It brings about a drastic change in her social identity and ritual status (see Madan 1975a). Among the Kashmiri Brahmans, when an old woman dies and her husband, older than her, accompanies the funeral party to the cremation ground, many women loudly express the wish that they too may die the same way, survived by the husband and sons.

Let me now turn to a more complex set of usages which may not appear to be covered by the foregoing analysis. The example that comes most readily to mind is the widespread practice among Hindi-speaking people of using the expression *śubhanāma* (rendered as 'good name' in Indian English) when

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inquiring about each other's names.[7] Similarly, a person's body or parts of it, for example the face or palms of the hands, may be said to bear *śubhalakṣaṇa* (auspicious signs or marks). While it would be appropriate to point out that the word *śubha* here refers to loveliness, grace, splendour, lustrousness, etc. (see Monier-Williams 1976), it must also be noted that these qualities are not so much values as signs indicative of the future course of events in an individual's life and his influence on the lives of others.[8] Kashmiri Brahmans extol Shiva as the most benign and beneficent divinity, for (to quote from a popular hymn) 'he is the one with all the *śubhalakṣaṇa*'.

To highlight the proper usage of the word *śubha*, it may be pointed out finally that there are certain human actions which create well-being through the very fact of being performed, so that one does not have to await an auspicious time for their performance or for their consequences. The Kashmiri Brahmans, who do not normally undertake a journey away from home except at an auspicious moment, do not consider it equally necessary to time similarly the return home, which is always auspicious. Similarly, whatever is done daily, including *pūjā*, and the cooking of food, does not have to await an auspicious hour though it has to be done outside a particularly inauspicious time, such as the duration of an eclipse or the presence of a dead body in the house. Some informants from Uttar Pradesh pointed to a further distinction in this regard, namely, that between *vyavahārika* (conventional) and *ādhyātmika* or *paramārthika* (spiritual) actions: when an action is motivated spiritually and not undertaken merely as a matter of convention or routine, the constraint of an inauspicious period of time—such as eclipses, *malamāsa* or *devaśayana*—becomes inoperative.[9]

[7] Bh. Krishnamurthy comments (in a personal communication): '*Śubhanāma* seems to be a recent innovation. There is no corresponding expression in the Southern languages; and there is no antonym, *aśubhanāma*.'

[8] According to a Chaturvedi Brahman informant, applying the *tilaka* (a very visible mark of auspiciousness) on the forehead produces well-being, particularly if this is done with the thumb of the right hand (the Kashmiri Brahmans use the middle finger) and if the thumb has *śubhalakṣaṇa* on it.

[9] The distinction between *ādhyātmika* or *paramārthika* and *vyavahārika* was made by some Uttar Pradeshi informants, as also by R. S. Khare (in a personal communication) who has written extensively on the Kanyakubja Brahmans (see Khare 1976a and 1976b).

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The foregoing selection from a thesaurus of usages (collected by me in Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh) points to the conclusion that the 'family resemblance' which obtains among them has its roots in the significance of the *passage of time* for human beings, which varies from one category of persons to another and even from one individual to another. What is crucial is not an abstract conception of time *per se*—which is neutral in character—but the intersection of cosmic and individual life trajectories which this flux entails. Auspiciousness, then, is an absolute value which manifests as a quality of events in the lives of human actors (*pātra*) and involves the dimensions of time (*kāla*) and space (*sthāna*).

The word *śuddha*, in contrast to *śubha*, is not generally used in everyday speech to refer to events.[10] The connotation of this word is conveyed by invoking images of fulness or completeness in the specific sense of perfection. It thus refers to the most desired condition of the human body or, more comprehensively, the most desired state of being. *Śuddha* and its opposite *aśuddha* are attributes of animate beings, inanimate objects and places with which a human being comes into contact in the course of everyday life. For example, a prepubescent unmarried girl (*kanyā*), water from a holy river, unboiled milk, ghee and a temple are *śuddha*. On the other hand, contact with certain kinds of human beings (low-caste Hindus or non-Hindus), animals (dogs), objects (goods made of leather), foods (beef or food cooked in impure utensils), substances (discharges from a human body), places (cremation ground), etc. causes Brahmans and other upper-caste Hindus to become polluted. The notion

[10] A Saryupari Brahman informant, who is a pundit and an astrologer, told me that he would not hesitate to speak of a *śuddha* moment of time from the point of view of the natural occurrence of an event or of a performance. Commenting on this, Baidyanath Saraswati writes (in a personal communication): 'Based on astrological calculation, a particular period, ranging from five to ten days or so, is called *śuddha* when the famous "marriage mart" of the Maithil Brahmans takes place (in Bihar) and marriages are solemnized. Within that period there are, of course, specific moments of time that are considered *śubha* for the ceremony. The duration of the *aśuddha* period from the point of view of marriage—called *aticara*—could be very much longer, lasting two to three years.'

In this connection, one informant pointed out that the horoscope of the Buddha contained the perfect conjunction (*yoga*) of *graha* and thus the *purity* of his Being also embodied the *auspiciousness* of Time.

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of perfection in the sense of freedom from error or fault is extended to certain actions also, as exemplified by such expressions as *śuddha-vicāra* (pure thoughts), *śuddha-uccāraṇa* (correct pronunciation, which is highly valued in the recitation of sacred texts), and *śuddha-svara* (normal or natural notes in music). Human thoughts, words and musical notes are thus treated (evaluated) as objects are.

Moreover, it is important to note that degrees of *śuddha*-ness are recognized. Gold is thus considered more *śuddha* than, say, copper, so that objects made of gold are always pure—'purified by the movement of air', say the Kashmiri Brahmans—while objects made of other metals require to be purified by washing with water or scrubbing with clay or cowdung and water. Even more significant is the notion that, while certain objects are *śuddha*, others—notably *darbha* grass (*Poa cynosuroides*), gold, food cooked on one's own hearth kept alive by fire originally lit at the time of one's marriage ritual, etc.—are not only pure in themselves but render pure whatever and whosoever comes in contact with them unless he or it is essentially impure (such as human excrement or a Shudra). A Kashmiri Brahman begins certain ritual performances by first putting on the middle finger of his right hand a 'ring' made by twisting together seven blades of *darbha*.[11] This 'ring' is called *pavitra*, that is, something which is itself pure and also purifies the wearer. The most *pavitra* (*paramapavitra*) object for the Brahman is his *yajñopavīta*, the three-stranded cotton neck cord that he wears from the time of his ritual initiation (*upanayana*) onwards and which symbolizes and protects his ritual status as a 'twice-born' (*dvija*) Hindu. At the time of the investiture of the neophyte with the neck cord, the *Gāyatrī mantra*[12] is whispered into his

[11] The seven blades of *darbha* are taken as representing the five senses (*prāṇa*), mind (*mana*) and intellect (*buddhi*). As the *pavitra* is put on the finger, a Sanskrit *mantra* is chanted: 'You [*pavitra*] are a hundred times purifier of the earth; you are a thousand times purifier of gods; you are health-bestowing: I associate you with progeny so that they become rich and abundant in wealth and prosperity.'

[12] Kashmiri Brahmans maintain that the highest knowledge, namely, the true understanding of *Brahman* (*brahma-jñāna*), has been distilled, as it were, in the *Gāyatrī mantra*. It is a prayer to the all-pervading Supreme Deity to bless the devotee with *dhī* or higher intelligence for the attainment of such knowledge. The prayer occurs in the Rig Veda (III.62.10) as also in the Sama and Yajur Vedas.

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ear by the family priest and he is thus made *śuddha*, that is, a perfect actor for the performance of rituals and the discharge of the adulthood roles of the householder. Ethnography on the subject of purity and pollution is so detailed, though not always illuminating (see Dumont 1980), that there is little that I can hope to contribute to the discussion beyond what I have written above.

I would, however, like to suggest a relationship between the categories of *śubha* and *śuddha* in relation to the *pātra* or actor.

I take up again the event of childbirth. It is auspicious if it occurs under the right circumstances, defined by the qualities of time, space and the actors concerned, particularly the child and the mother. In actuality, the rightness of circumstances is a matter of degree, for it rarely happens that every factor is without blemish to make the event perfectly auspicious. But even in the best of circumstances, the event renders the child's mother and agnatic kin ritually impure and causes pollution (*aśauca*, a specific expression of *aśuddha*) to them. The child itself is also impure. This pollution, however, pales into insignificance in the light of the joy of the auspicious character of childbirth, particularly the birth of a son, which is duly celebrated through ritual performances and social ceremonies during the following eleven days, culminating in the ritual of purification.

In consonance with such an evaluation of the *śubha* but *aśuddha* aspects of childbirth is the fact that it is not the pollution that death causes which is the matter of deeper concern but the inauspiciousness of the event. My Kashmiri Brahman informants are absolutely unambiguous in their statement of this fact. The pollution wears off (through the passage of time) and is removed (through the performance of rituals) step by step. It is, however, only the occurrence of an auspicious event, most notably the birth of a male child, that finally removes the pall of inauspiciousness which hangs like a dark cloud on a family in which a death has occurred (see Khare 1976a: 185).

Two other types of situation may now be briefly mentioned. First, the situation where both auspiciousness and purity are considered characteristic of an event. Brahmans regard ritual initiation and marriage (the former perhaps more than the latter) as the most notable examples. Second, the situation

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where inauspiciousness and purity may be found to coexist: but no such situation is acknowledged in practice, emphasizing the overriding quality of auspiciousness.

Speaking specifically about the Kashmiri Brahmans, their attitude to pollution is a pragmatic one. One can avoid contact with many polluting things by the exercise of care or self-restraint. Prescribed procedures, fairly often quite simple (such as washing), are available to remove the consequences of contamination resulting from contact with such things. To be cleansed of pollution when it is unavoidable, one has not only to wash but to do so *immediately*, for example after evacuation, or *after the lapse of a period of time*, as following a birth or death in the family. Mere washing may not help restore ritual status and certain expiatory rites may have to be performed.[13] Moreover, one is pure or impure in relation to someone else or an object or the performance of a particular act in a certain degree. A menstruating woman is severely polluted for the purpose of participation in rituals (particularly the feeding of the manes), but she is not secluded nor required to eat or sleep outside the home.

The daily life of the Kashmiri Brahmans is beset by *śaṅkā*, that is, doubt or perplexity: hesitations as to whether to do something or not, how to do it, when to do it, and so on. The burden of such uncertainty is heavier in the context of the inauspiciousness of certain events than in the context of the impure nature of some things, for the former are not as easily manageable as the latter.[14] A person must watch out, when he

[13] It may be noted here that in *āyurveda*, *śuddhi* refers to the 'purification' of the insides of the body through the administration of enemas and of potions to induce vomitting, blood-letting, etc.; *śuci* refers to purification by ritual means (*mantra*, *japa*, etc.).

[14] Apropos pollution by contact, cf.: 'In this limited sense, impurity is more powerful than purity, but contact here loses something of its religious character: *it does not bring misfortune or disease but only social degradation*' (Dumont and Pocock 1959: 30, emphasis added). I think this is precisely how Kashmiri Brahmans also interpret pollution. It should, however, be noted here that some scholars consider this a narrow interpretation: for instance Das (1982) considers the life/death framework more fundamental and inclusive than the pure/impure or the good-sacred/bad-sacred frameworks. She observes: 'the symbolism of impurity marks off situations which are liminal in the sense that the individual experiences his social world as separated from the cosmic. The paradigm for liminality is provided by death' (ibid.: 120).

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sets out from his home on an important errand, lest somebody symbolizing obstruction or failure and, therefore, inauspiciousness be encountered or—if the encounter does take place—allowed to pass by one's right side coming from the opposite direction. Among the most dreaded of such encounters is that with a priest, including one's own family priest, without whose presence no ritual performance, including the auspicious ones, is possible.[15]

Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, an encounter with a Mahabrahman (who assists at cremations and receives gifts from mourners after a death) is normally considered very inauspicious. However, if he is encountered by a party carrying a dead body for cremation, sighting him is believed to minimize the inauspiciousness of the death and is, therefore, welcome. The unexpected arrival of a sannyasi at a *vidyārambha* (beginning of the study of the sacred texts) ceremony is highly auspicious, but the encounter of a marriage party with him is equally highly inauspicious and, therefore, dreaded. To take a final example, the Brahmans of both Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh consider milk to be one of the purest drinks, to be consumed on auspicious occasions and also offered in worship to deities. It is, however, never consumed at the commencement of a journey, for which occasion yoghurt is the appropriate food, though yoghurt may not be offered to a deity.

The nature of the priest, the Mahabrahman and the renouncer, or of milk and yoghurt, does not change but the significance of different events alters one's relationship to these persons and foods as the normal (not necessarily desirable) life trajectories of the actors involved in them are, as it were, reinforced or deflected and weakened. These examples point to the 'heterogeneousness of time' (Eliade 1974: 147) and the consequent perplexties of the mind in the face of inauspiciousness. The anxiety, fear and emotional disturbance which ominous events give rise to are, according to my informants, much more intense than the doubts regarding correct conduct asso-

[15] See footnote 6 above. Other bad omens recognized by Kashmiri Brahmans include, besides death (particularly during the *pañcaka*), unpleasant dreams, the hooting of owls (symbolizing death and destruction), etc. In Uttar Pradesh the sight of mating crows is considered a portent of many deaths, for crows are identified with ancestors.

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ciated with contact with impure persons, objects and places: my own observation of people's behaviour in rural Kashmir confirms this asseveration.

CONCERNING THE CATEGORIES 'ŚUBHA AND 'ŚUDDHA': ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES AND QUERIES

I now turn to ethnography to explore how the notion of auspiciousness has been handled by anthropologists. I will not undertake a comprehensive survey of literature but confine myself to three authors, namely M. N. Srinivas, R. S. Khare and Frédérique Marglin, each one of whom has devoted considerable attention to this subject, to point out some critical issues that seem to be worthy of clarification and further research. Besides, they provide, between themselves, illustrative material from southern, eastern and northern India.[16]

In his classic study of religion and society among the Coorgs of south India, Srinivas (1952) went into the details of purity and pollution with unprecedented care and also made an important contribution to our understanding of auspiciousness as an aspect of domestic life. It would seem that his earlier study of marriage and the family among various castes of Karnataka, based on his own fieldwork and on published works (see Srinivas 1942), had already sensitized him to this important cultural notion among Hindus. He had thus noted that purchases for a marriage are made and the marriage solemnized on an auspicious day and that married women—the so-called *sumaṅgalī*—are particularly qualified to bless a bride (ibid.: 68–75).

In his second book, Srinivas points out quite early that, according to Coorg belief, 'Every important task must begin in an auspicious moment, or it will fail' (1952: 39). He then dwells on the ritual of *maṅgala* or auspiciousness (ibid.: 70ff), which may be performed on certain happy occasions in the life of an individual but is specifically identified with marriage.

[16] I now find the absence of any discussion of the category of auspiciousness in my account of family and kinship among the Pandits of rural Kashmir (see Madan 1965) rather disconcerting, though not inexplicable. I mentioned auspiciousness and did not confuse it with purity, but did not distinguish between events (weddings) and persons (sons). I also failed to clarify that it was not in sons as such that auspiciousness resides but in what they do—most notably, feeding the manes, begetting sons and continuing the lineage.

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Maṅgala is described by him as 'an auspicious or good-sacred ceremony that has to be performed on an auspicious day' (ibid.: 74); the central rite of *mūrta* (derived from the Sanskrit *muhūrta*) in the *maṅgala* complex is performed during a particularly auspicious part of the chosen day. Moreover, the ritual is performed in an 'auspicious' place, such as the ancestral home. *Maṅgala* results in a rearrangement of social structure dramatized by the change in the status of the nubile girl who now becomes a *sumaṅgalī*, that is, one who has a beneficent influence on the lives of other people, obviously by virtue of being herself a blessed person (ibid.: 157).[17] It follows that a widow, who must live alone and not in conjugal bliss,[18] has lost her own blessedness as well as the power to bless.

All this fits in well with the analysis in the previous section of this essay, but it has to be noted that Srinivas does not bring out as clearly as one would have wished the various nuances of meaning in the different uses of the word 'auspicious'. His use of it as a general adjective which defines events, persons and places alike may conceal the fact that in its primary connotation the word refers to an event—to marriage—which produces general well-being (*maṅgala* in Sanskrit). What is perhaps even more regrettable is his decision to include auspiciousness and purity together in the encompassing category of 'good-sacred' without clearly distinguishing between them. He also draws attention to certain formal similarities between actions characteristic of auspicious and inauspicious occasions without providing a discussion of the significance of this formal similarity and of the content of these actions. That 'inversion' occurs is, however, quite obvious.

Commenting on Srinivas's handling of *maṅgala*, Dumont and Pocock (1959: 33) suggest a deeper structure by assimilating auspiciousness into what they consider to be the most funda-

[17] In his account of marriages among Karnataka castes, Srinivas points out that the *tāli*, which the bridegroom ties round the bride's neck, has knots in it made by her mother and other *sumaṅgalī* and is threaded by a prostitute who is referred to as *nitya* (ever)-*sumaṅgalī* (Srinivas 1942: 75). Writing on Tamil women, Reynolds says that *cumaṅkali* literally means an auspicious woman, but clarifies that this auspiciousness does not refer to her own being as a woman but to her relationship with certain significant 'others', notably, her husband and children (1980: 38).

[18] See footnote 4 above (p. 52).

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mental of underlying ideas, namely, purity. I do not find this way of resolving the problem of the relationship between auspiciousness and purity quite satisfactory as it ignores the need to examine the independent character of the relations of auspiciousness. The crucial observation in this regard, it may be recalled from the previous section of this essay, is that there are no empirical examples available of the combination of the inauspicious and the pure in a single event, though the other three combinations are exemplified by birth (auspicious-impure), death (inauspicious-impure), and marriage (auspicious-pure)—a fact noted by these authors themselves (though not exactly in the same terms as employed here). Their position is, ultimately, derived from their premise that 'the religion of caste is fundamental' (ibid.: 34).

I now turn to Khare's two books on the cultural significance of food among the Kanyakubja Brahmans of Uttar Pradesh (north India) in which he employs the words 'auspicious' and 'inauspicious' quite extensively. His most general definition of auspiciousness is in terms of those regular happenings which symbolize or seek to bring about a 'pervasive, established domestic value' of collective and comprehensive well-being (1976a: 109, 121n, 185, *et passim*). He clearly sees purity as a value encompassed by the value of auspiciousness. He writes: 'All regular ritual techniques that help establish ritual purity ultimately result in a Hindu householder's constant concern with a morally desirable auspiciousness (for there is no other kind) which, for him, must pervade the ritual and social world if everything between him, his social group and his gods is proceeding properly' (ibid.: 109). Elsewhere, he writes that irrespective of the states of purity and impurity, 'the inauspicious (*aśubha*) should not be allowed to take over in one's household life' (ibid.: 144).

In view of the foregoing, it is surprising that Khare should not have maintained clearly and consistently the distinction between auspiciousness and purity—between events and things—and should have merely written of the 'congruence' between the two (1976b: 71f): the equation that he sets up ('auspiciousness: pure: high:: unauspiciousness: impure: low') breaks down, as—to repeat—birth is an auspicious event but causes pollution. A further blurring of heuristically important

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distinctions occurs when Khare (like many other scholars) prefixes the adjective 'auspicious' to foods, food areas, cooking utensils, food processing implements, cooking techniques, and even numbers, without bringing out clearly the temporal context. It is, however, only fair to acknowledge that he does draw attention to the character of some objects (such as utensils) as 'definite and dominant symbols of happiness and sorrow' (ibid.: 55) and also points out that certain actions (for example, certain cooking techniques) are similarly symbolic of 'normalcy or auspiciousness or festivity' (ibid.: 62). This is the familiar relation between the signifier and the signified and, one hopes, will be elaborated in future research on the subject.

The third scholar whose work I discuss here is Frédérique Marglin. Her primary concern is with the role of the king and of the *devadāsīs* in the ritual complex associated with the Jagannatha temple at Puri. She pursues her studies along several thematic paths, including notably a richly documented and explicitly articulated discussion of the nature and significance of auspiciousness, purity and power (*śakti*). It is not possible here to undertake a detailed examination of her published and unpublished work (1977, 1985) and I will confine myself to drawing attention to the following aspects of it.

(1) Marglin makes a clear distinction between auspiciousness and purity: the latter is said to pertain to the ordered, hierarchical domain of caste but the former is free flowing. This is best exemplified by the fact that, though the *devadāsīs* are associated with auspiciousness in diverse ways—they dance and sing in the temple every day and on various special occasions; they also sing the joyous songs of well-being (*maṅglagīta*) in the homes of their patrons (the priests of the temple) on happy occasions connected with the life-cycle, most notably marriage—and though they are unfettered by caste regulations, they are yet not allowed to go into the inner sanctum of the temple because they are considered unchaste. Their auspiciousness arises from their being the wives of the god Jagannatha and his representative on earth, the king of Puri; they are *ahya*, ever-married, for the god transcends the mortal domain of birth and death. The *devadāsīs*' impurity results from their being permitted (in fact, expected) to live as concubines of the temple priests who are the servants (*sebākār*) of the

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temple god. Their body (*deha*) is, therefore, impure. This essential distinction between auspiciousness/inauspiciousness and purity/impurity (to which I have already drawn attention in the discussion of everyday usages earlier in this chapter) thus seems to be supported by empirical evidence from different domains of life and is also analytically illuminating.

(2) Marglin also presents a list of the cultural meanings, embodiments and 'representatives'—the signifiers—of auspiciousness. It is said to refer to a state of well-being, happiness and pleasure. It is associated with eating and the plentifulness of food; with sexual union, fertility and growth; with progeny and prosperity. It is embodied in, or represented by, water jars, aquatic animals, flags, doors, erotic sculptures, sounds, etc., and, above all, the *devadāsīs*. They are called by Marglin the 'harbingers of auspiciousness'; she also designates them as 'specialists in auspiciousness'.

When Marglin refers to *devadāsīs* as specialists in auspiciousness (and the tribal *daita* as specialists in inauspiciousness), I take it to mean that, though what the *devadāsīs*/*daitas* do has happy consequences, because their works are ultimately conducive to well-being (*maṅgalakārya*), yet there are elements in the situation in which the *daitas* are involved which are inauspicious, namely, the 'illness' and 'death' of the gods. However, the rejuvenation of the gods also begins at the hands of the *daitas*. The element of the passage of time is important here and, as Marglin illustrates richly, the Hindu conception of it may be more complex than what would be familiar from a Western perspective. Thus, while auspiciousness and the *devadāsīs* are said to symbolize the forward flow of time—the present in relation to the future—inauspiciousness and the *daitas* are related to the reversal of time, that is, death and the past. The *daitas* seem to be of crucial significance as they dramatize the flux of time more sharply than do the *devadāsīs*, so much so that the demarcation between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness itself appears to be arbitrary or is resolved. Marglin does not, however, push her analysis in this direction.

It would be useful to recall here two important distinctions mentioned by me earlier: first, between objects and persons *as such*, on the one hand, and these as symbols, on the other; second, between objects and persons, on the one hand, and

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events and performances, on the other. When the *devadāsīs* are called *maṅgalanārī* and the songs they sing *maṅgalagīta*, it is clear that two meanings are implied: first, and obviously (even superficially perhaps), these women and their songs contribute to an atmosphere of joy; second, they are associated with happy events whether these occur (births) or are arranged (weddings, pilgrimages). In the process they come to symbolize auspiciousness. Though the distinction between person or act, event and symbol, may be blurred in speech and in the minds of speakers, its validity must not be lost sight of by the analyst.

When pilgrims come to Puri they are told by the priests that seeing and circumambulating *devadāsīs* are auspicious; that is, these actions produce well-being. In the same spirit, worshippers in the temple pick the dust from the feet of dancing *devadāsīs*, or roll on the ground where they have danced, in the hope of attaining well-being, of winning divine grace, for they are told that the *devadāsīs* are the embodiment of Lakshmi.[19] We see here instances of the coalescence of the carrier or bearer of auspiciousness (the *devadāsī*) and its ultimate source (Lakshmi) and this too should be borne in mind.

(3) In her analysis of the consecration ritual within the famous Car Festival (*ratha-yātrā*) ritual complex, Marglin brings out clearly the inter-relatedness of time, place, and person or actor: the *devadāsīs* and the *daitas* are described as doing different things in different parts of the temple on this very special occasion, all contributing to a single though complex task. An actor (*pātra*) in this context stands not merely for a neutral being but an adept, one worthy of receiving the responsibility for a certain role. The issue is that of establishing *pātratā*, that is, one's credentials for the performance of the role. The Brahmans and the *daitas* are born into their role categories; the *devadāsīs* are recruited from different castes for their roles by being dedicated to Jagannatha.

Auspiciousness, then, refers in Marglin's analysis to a situa-

[19] On being told of this, one of my Kanyakubja Brahman informants recalled the myth of the crocodile who tried to drag an elephant into the river to devour him. Thinking its end had come, the elephant, who was a devotee of Vishnu, lifted a lotus with its trunk as a last offering to the god. Vishnu appeared on the scene and redeemed both the elephant and the crocodile: the former for his pure devotion and latter because it had touched the foot of a devotee—itself an act of piety.

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tion which enables us to see its constitutive elements in their inter-relatedness and thus in the right perspective. The actor or person (*pātra*), motivated by an explicit purpose (*uddeśya*), and specifically recruited to fulfil it, performs an act or role (*kārya*), in a prescribed manner (*rīti*), in a certain place (*sthāna*), at a specified time (*kāla*), which results in collective well-being (*maṅgala*). That is: the *devadāsī*, dedicated to god, imbued with divine devotion, sings and dances in the outer sanctum of the temple at various times of the day and year: this brings about well-being, just as the feeding of the temple god by the Brahmans does: and the feeding and the dancing take place simultaneously. Dancing, we are further told, symbolizes sexual union in this ritual context. If any one of the elements (purpose, properly accredited actor, the action, the time, and the place) is absent or imperfect, though nothing else is changed, the formal auspiciousness of the situation disappears. To illustrate, the most talented Odissi dancer could not be allowed to dance in the temple for she is not the right *pātra*, although she knows very well how to do it. Similarly, the *devadāsī* may not leave Puri to become a professional dancer and yet retain the right to participate in the ritual complex of the temple, for she would then violate the parameters of time and place and have abandoned the legitimate purpose of her work. Needless to add, what is true of the *devadāsī* is also applicable to the Brahman and the *daita*.

The 'situation', I may add, must be conceptualized in dynamic rather than static terms: it must be seen as an event, a point emphasized earlier in this chapter in the course of my examination of the everyday usage of the words *śubha* and *śuddha*. Time thus appears to be the key element in the situation which illumines the others. In this context the observations of two Uttar Pradeshi Brahman informants—both pundits of the traditional type—appear to be apposite. According to them, *kāla* is the ultimate cause of everything that happens. Its characteristic manifestation is *pravāha* (flow) or *vartana* (movement, circular movement). It is *anādi* (without beginning), *ananta* (without end) and *sarvavyāpaka* (all-pervading, encompassing). Deified as Kala, it is the guardian of life and the upholder of *dharma* (righteousness), and appropriately presides over death. It is not amenable to human control. *Deśa*

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or *sthāna* (place, location), the informants maintained, is *vyāpya* (permeable, encompassed): it has been created and will be destroyed in time. Human beings realize their being within this framework, in the union of *śakti* and *prakṛti*.[20]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

J. L. Austin once complained that the history of Western philosophy was littered with 'tidy-looking dichotomies', with the student being required to embrace one half or the other (1962: 3). It certainly has not been my intention to propose over-simplifications of this type in respect of the categories *śubha* and *śuddha* in Hindu culture. I have only tried to suggest that certain analytical distinctions are heuristically useful inasmuch as they enable us to understand better the relations and the principles of relationship between the categories under examination.

If auspiciousness/inauspiciousness refers primarily to events —and ultimately to life itself as an event-structure— and if purity/impurity is basically an attribute of objects, why have anthropologists confused the categories by objectifying the events? It would seem that this happened because we have tended to follow too closely what the informants say. Though the informants are usually well aware of behavioural norms and everyday usages, they are not always aware of ambiguities in these. Moreover, they readily—almost unthinkingly—switch from literal to figurative language and back again. In other words, they speak in metaphors, carrying over aspects of events (or objects) to objects (or other objects), and also ignore the distinction between mental and physical concepts, between words and things. Auspicious married women and inauspicious widows are instances of the transferred epithet (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Our task as anthropologists would seem to lie in overcoming ambiguity and decoding figurative language and bringing

[20] Much attention has been devoted to the concepts of *kāla* and *deśa/sthāna* in the Hindu tradition from the Vedas onwards through the *brāhmaṇas*, Upanishads, and Puranas and the two great epics (Mahabharata and Ramayana). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (one of the six systems of Hindu metaphysics) is particularly concerned with these categories (see Bhaduri 1947).

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out clearly what we receive through interrogation and observation confusedly. We seek to abstract certain concepts in a cross-cultural framework that hardly concern the people whose culture we study and, therefore, remain unarticulated and unexpressed in it. Auspiciousness is highly meaningful to people in their everyday life but the abstract concept of the passage of time is much less so. Our own hesitation to explicate such concepts perhaps leads us to draw conclusions too soon and at too low a level of generality to produce better understanding.

The present discussion points to the need to explore more systematically than has been done so far the relatively neglected theme of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness in Hindu culture. Of course, this should not be attempted independently of the notion of purity/impurity—for then we would produce only distortions of reality—but in relation to it. The particular expressions and associations of the notion of auspiciousness may vary, but quite clearly it is of basic importance, at least in the scheme of values of upper castes, and is associated with the passage or flux of time and the significance of this fact for human life. If this notion is found closely interlinked with that of purity among upper castes but less so as we move down the ladder, that itself would, far from downgrading the importance of studying it, underscore its potential for deepening our understanding of purity and of the basic elements of Hindu culture.

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3

ASCETICISM AND EROTICISM

Should I sojourn in austerity
on the sacred river's bank,
or should I, in worldly fashion,
court women of high grace?
BHARTRIHARI

Free thine self from the threefold nature of things; rise above all opposites, abide always in purity—self-possessed and whole.
BHAGAVAD GITA

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, based on an essay originally written in honour of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, I follow in his footsteps and make an attempt to examine the problem of moral choices in South Asian societies. I do so in the limited context of the nature–culture dichotomy, which occupies a central place in anthropological literature, and its transformations in Hindu culture.

Fürer-Haimendorf's important study of values and mechanisms of social control in some South Asian societies, *Morals and Merit* (1967), is an invitation to South Asianists generally, and the anthropologists among them particularly, to examine moral concepts in different cultural settings and explore how these enter into the choices that people make. By moral concepts I understand those imperatives of conduct which proclaim what Iris Murdoch (1970) so felicitously calls 'the sovereignty of good', and to which men and women refer when they want to know what is *right* in a certain situation and what one *ought* to do in it—in short, when they are faced with the question, How best to live? Such considerations are especially relevant when people are called upon to make one of those crucial

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choices which are expected to alter the course of their lives and bestow a new character upon it. Calculations of prudence and utility are here ruled out in principle.

If the central concern of anthropology is with man and woman in relation to culture, then it obviously cannot but be interested in cultural definitions of the problem of human fate and its contingent character. Such an interest entails the study of both the moral choices that people make in a society and the moral concepts or cultural values they invoke in support of their decisions.

Fürer-Haimendorf's approach to the study of moral concepts is comparative in the classical anthropological tradition. He believes that 'there is no society in which the individual is left without guidance and has to make moral choices without reference to social prescriptions' (1967: 224). He also maintains that, 'However divergent the moral systems of two given societies may be, the difference and consequently the mutual incomprehensibility seems to be never as complete as that between two unrelated languages' (ibid.: 11). He sets out, therefore, to look for what he calls the 'common elements' of moral systems, such as 'filial piety, charity, courtesy and truthfulness', which 'can be used in relation to a variety of moral systems' (ibid.: 11–12).

The metaphysical underpinning of the argument in *Morals and Merit* is recognizably and, perhaps, inevitably that of Western philosophy. Within this philosophical tradition there is a well-known argument, going back to Aristotle, according to which man is regarded as being moral by nature, but morality is said to be bestowed not by nature but by culture. In this context, Aristotle's distinction between the intellectual and moral strands of virtue, made in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, may be recalled. According to it, moral virtue is the result of habit, as is obvious from its name *ethike*, which is derived by a slight variation from *ethos*, habit. It follows that specific moral virtues cannot be implanted in us by nature. In Durkheimian terms, this amounts to an affirmation of the categorical imperative of the collective consciousness which guides and constrains individual actors in their pursuits. That such a point of view will greatly appeal to the student of culture, which Fürer-Haimendorf is, need hardly be emphasized here.

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There are other traditions that also locate morality—a code—in the actor's nature or substance, but do so in a manner which derives the content of ethical conduct from nature itself: they do not treat the latter as a vessel which may be filled in any way that one likes. The Hindu theory of *guṇa*, as enunciated in the Bhagavad Gita (chapter 14), for instance, is such an alternative viewpoint: put blandly, the moral person is said to be of *sāttvik* or 'good' nature while the evil person is of *tāmasik* or 'dull' nature. Whatever either does is determined by this primal fact.[1] The other viewpoint deriving moral conduct from the pursuit of prescribed actions is also available in the Hindu tradition: while Upanisadic literature stresses innate moral nature, the *dharmaśāstras* emphasize behaviour: in so far as *dharma* is derived from *smṛti*, it is also habit.[2]

The data on which *Morals and Merit* is based are derived from the author's extensive fieldwork among several South Asian societies in central and eastern India and in Nepal, 'ranging from the most primitive of nomadic food-gatherers to the highly civilized adherents of some of the world's great historic religions', namely Buddhism and Hinduism (1967: 207). He almost insists that the anthropologist's data must come from direct observation of conduct and not from a society's 'self-image presented by its own *literati*'. The danger he seems to have in mind is that of a distortion of the ethnographic narrative by subjective bias, but he is quick to acknowledge that 'the anthropological method inevitably involves an element of subjectivity', for the anthropologist has his or her own 'ideological inclinations or unconscious prejudices' (ibid.: 207).

The foregoing acknowledgement of the inevitability of subjectivity in anthropological work encourages me to attempt in this chapter a discussion of moral choices in Hindu culture on the basis of three celebrated works of contemporary Indian fiction. Without at all implying any disagreement with Fürer-Haimendorf's legitimate emphasis on the importance of *observed* conduct, I am concerned here with a discussion of first order interpretations of the kind that the anthropologist's informants are so well known to provide. My informants in the present case happen to be three novelists, and their novels are fragments of

[1] For a well-known discussion of the notion of *guṇa*, see Aurobindo 1950.

[2] I owe this point to Kanti Shah.

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the original discourse of contemporary Hindu intellectuals on modes of behaviour characteristic of their society. If a novel appeals to a wide variety of readers, it must tell them something that is of deep concern to them: the art of the narrator-novelist does not by itself explain such wide interest. In fact, Ferdinand de Saussure's dialectical distinction between *langue* and *parole* has been drawn upon by Roland Barthes and others who have suggested that the common cultural background of the author and his public is a condition for the creation of a literary work, that the former is implied by the latter.

Needless to emphasize here, works of fiction are not false though they certainly are a product of creative imagination: they are interpretations fashioned by an artist just as works of ethnography should be interpretations made by the anthropologist. A naive distinction between the 'real' world of the social scientist and the 'imagined' world of the novelist need not detain us here. In fact, it may well be argued that in dealing with human actions and their underlying motives at the most general level, the social scientist has not yet succeeded in going beyond the truly great novelist (see Berger 1977). What is more, in the specific context of the theme of the present essay, it has been suggested that 'What especially the novel does is aid us in the imaginative recreation of moral complexities in the widest sense' (Putnam 1977: 87).

What follows, then, is my attempt to construct a discussion of moral choices in terms of the original discourse provided by the novelist. That my essay itself could be used by a non-Indian student of Indian societies and cultures to construct his own interpretation of Indian culture is another matter and acceptable to me as a legitimate project.

It may be clarified that in the discussion that follows I eschew cross-cultural comparison, not because I consider it unimportant but because the many methodological problems that it raises—above all, that of the comparability of people's own categories of thought—seem very complex to me for adequate treatment in the available space. I therefore concentrate here on what has been called 'thick description'. This is best done by focusing on one culture at a time, and exploring it for the 'structures of inference and implication' (Geertz 1973: 7), of 'signification' (ibid.: 9), which are the object of ethnography.

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What one produces thus is an interpretation of patterns of culture in the light of the knowledge that other patterns exist, though not in direct and explicit confrontation with them.

By the very nature of the enterprise, the discussion that follows is not comprehensive but only illustrative. It provides vignettes of moral situations of one type, namely, the clash between asceticism (*tapas*) and eroticism (*kāmuktā*), and seeks to bring out the implications of the choices that people involved in them usually make.

THREE MORAL DISCOURSES

The novels I have chosen for discussion are Bhagvaticharan Varma's Hindi novel *Chitralekha*, U. R. Anantha Murthy's Kannada novel *Samskara*, translated into English by A. K. Ramanujan (the famous Indo-Anglian poet), and Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar's Marathi novel *Yayati*, rendered into Hindi by Moreshvar Tapasvi. Needless to say, my discussion of the three novels is in no way concerned with their literary merit or aesthetic value—I am totally unqualified for such an undertaking, nor is that my intention here. My effort is confined to sorting out the moral choices described and evaluated in them. The presentation of the characters, events and arguments from the novels is selective and interpretive. I have tried not to distort the authors' intentions, though I have throughout paraphrased their language. I have added explanatory comments wherever doing so seemed useful in developing my argument about the nature–culture dichotomy.

Chitralekha was originally published in 1933 and was the work of a young novelist then in his thirties. It has by now acquired the status of a modern classic in Hindi literature. Two Hindi movie versions of it have been made. *Samskara* was published in 1965 and attracted wide attention, particularly after it was made into an award-winning Kannada film in 1970. Anantha Murthy, now in his fifties, teaches English literature at Mysore University. Ramanujan's English translation came out in 1976. *Yayati* was published in 1959 when Khandekar was sixty-one years old and already a renowned littérateur. The novel won him the acclaim of critics and finally, in 1976, a year before his death, the country's prestigious liter-

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ary award, the Gyanpith Puraskar. It is a long work of almost 180,000 words and more than twice as long as *Chitralekha* or *Samskara*. The Hindi translation by Tapasvi was published in 1977.

Situational morality: a snare?

Chitralekha opens with a question which two disciples ask of their guru: they would like to know what *pāpa* is, it being presumed that they have already been instructed in the nature and significance of its binary opposite, *puṇya*. It is very difficult to translate these terms, but I will follow the general practice and render *pāpa* as 'immoral' or 'wicked' and *puṇya* as 'moral' or 'meritorious' (Monier-Williams 1976).

The guru says that he does not know what *pāpa* is, having no personal experience of it, suggesting that deductive reasoning will fail to provide an answer. He therefore decides to send the two young men to discover for themselves what *pāpa* is. One of them, a Brahman, is sent to become a disciple of a great yogi, Kumaragiri, and the other, a Kshatriya, is assigned as a servant to a feudal aristocrat, Bijagupta. The scene is laid in the capital city of Pataliputra and its environs during the days of the king Chandragupta Maurya (*c.* 310 B.C.). Kumaragiri and Bijagupta emerge as the two protagonists in the story and represent not merely two life-styles but, in fact, two apparently opposed moral choices.

Kumaragiri, as already stated, is a yogi. Though youthful, he claims to have overcome all bodily desires and worldly attachments and found what he considers true happiness. Worldly life is to him the means to an end which is the life beyond corporeal existence. He is a scholar and an adept in ritualistic practices and has spiritual attainments to his credit. The peculiar combination of youth and non-attachment has given him the unique distinction of possessing both an effulgent presence and moral power. Kumaragiri represents the principle of culture or refinement (*saṁskṛti*) as against that of untamed nature (*prakṛti*), of the spirit (*ātmā*) as against the material body (*śarīra*); he embodies in himself a moral choice which proclaims the superiority of asceticism over eroticism.

Bijagupta is the opposite type: he is a young, handsome and wealthy feudal lord of high social status. Worldly attachments

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and joys, here and now, are the *summum bonum* of his life. Though unmarried, he has an apt companion in Chitralekha, the city's most gifted and celebrated dancer. She is an intelligent and cultured person, and shares with Bijagupta his world-view. Born a Brahman, widowed at an early age, involved subsequently in a love affair, mother of an illegitimate child, life's ironies have led her through several changes of fortune into the affection of Bijagupta. Though his mistress, she lives independently of him, in a style which matches his. Together, they aver the value of natural bodily appetites and their satisfaction as the supreme source of happiness. They consider the self-control and self-denial of the ascetic destructive not only of the human body but of the soul itself. In their own eyes, and in the eyes of many people, their life too represents a moral choice which proclaims the superiority of life-affirming eroticism (using the word in its broadest sense) over life-denying asceticism, of the *bhogī* over the yogi.[3]

The sequence of events which brings out the implications and significance of these choices is triggered off by a chance encounter between Kumaragiri and Bijagupta and Chitralekha when the latter two seek shelter in his hermitage one night. Kumaragiri is greatly upset by the presence of a woman in his hut. On Bijagupta's inquiry as to why an ascetic, who has acquired mastery over his senses, should be reluctant to give shelter to a woman, Kumaragiri answers that woman represents the darkness of attachment, desire and illusion and has no place in the world of knowledge. This leads to a discussion between him and Chitralekha over such metaphysical issues as appearance or the relativity of perception and reality or the-thing-in-itself. The encounter produces an unusual result: the yogi sees knowledge as the dancer's most outstanding attribute and she finds him an irresistibly handsome man.

This encounter is followed by another in the royal court where Kautilya, the king's chief adviser, is expounding on the

[3] To introduce a cross-cultural reference from the Japanese literary tradition, the myth portions of *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* would seem to support a similar view: 'Morality lies in the total sympathy of one person for another, in the desire to give, not humanitarian "rights", but human fulfilment, even as he receives the same common and essential gift. In a real sense, morality derives from the forms of love' (Pelzel 1974: 23).

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conflict between statecraft and justice (*nīti*) on the one hand, and religious and moral duty (*dharma*) on the other. Kautilya is a rationalist and a pragmatist and considers morality, religion and even God as cultural constructs and, therefore, subject to criticism and rational reformulation. Kumaragiri, also present in the court, is unable to match Kautilya's logic but demonstrates spiritual power by performing a miracle.[4]

Chitralekha, who is also the court dancer, engages the yogi in argument and succeeds in making him confess that he had resorted to the performance of a miracle because he could not establish by argument the existence of a divine being or the supremacy of *dharma*. Defending himself, he emphasizes the importance of faith and imagination for the seeker of the spirit. Chitralekha is, however, judged by the court to have won the argument. Kumaragiri also knows this to be true; his particular sense of defeat arises from the fact that he has been vanquished in a philosophical debate by a 'fallen' woman, a mere dancer.

Defeated and dismayed, Kumaragiri retires to his hermitage but is visited there by Chitralekha. She tells him that she has come to receive spiritual instruction from him; but actually she is in love with him. The yogi finds the situation incomprehensible: how can one devoted to the body's pleasures possibly become a seeker of things spiritual? Chitralekha tries to silence his doubts, saying she has turned her back on her past. She knows, however, that she poses a threat to his whole being. This is, in fact, the threat that the realm of nature seemingly always poses to that of culture. While the human agent seeks *puṇya*, he is pursued by *pāpa*.

Moreover, Chitralekha tries to teach Kumaragiri a view of the nature of woman contrary to that enunciated by him at their first meeting. Woman is spiritual power (*śakti*), she says, and the principle of creation. He who fears woman is unworthy of his humanity. Kumaragiri begins to experience, besides the power of her intellect, the attraction of her bodily beauty. He holds his ground, nevertheless, refusing to accept her as a disciple. He tells her that if he consents to impart spiritual instruction to her, he fears he will himself end by becoming her

[4] I am not sure whether the novelist's interpretation of Kautilya's view would be accepted by the scholars concerned with exegeses of the *Arthashastra*. This is not, however, important from my point of view.

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devotee, and that he is not prepared for such a reversal of roles. The vulnerability of his own moral choice is apparent to him.

Chitralekha decides to leave Bijagupta. She informs him that she thinks she has become a burden on him and, therefore, ought to pull out of his life so that he can marry. However, she pledges eternal love for Bijagupta, love based on the union of souls rather than that of bodies. She thus recommends the transformation of the carnal relationship into a spiritual one.

Seeing through Chitralekha's protestations, Bijagupta is greatly shaken by the turn of events. Without seeking it, he is thrown into the company of another feudal lord and his daughter, Yashodhara, while on a visit to Kashi. Yashodhara had earlier been offered to him in marriage but he had refused the offer, saying that, though he was formally unmarried, he considered Chitralekha his wife. For him this was a question of moral judgement rather than legal fact: marriage is not an event, he had said, but an everlasting physical-cum-spiritual bond between man and woman.

On one occasion an interesting conversation takes place between Bijagupta and Yashodhara about nature (*prakṛti*) and culture (*saṁskṛti*), which is directly relevant to the present essay. He is unmoved by her unbounded enthusiasm for nature and its beauty, and draws her attention to its harsh and ugly aspects. He also points out to her that, from the point of view of human beings, nature is incomplete. Human creations, without which life is impossible, have their origin in nature's imperfections.

Bijagupta subsequently has an encounter with a sannyasi who tells him that, though the creations of culture are intended to lighten the burden of nature, they are artificial and must not be regarded as being constitutive of life: such an attitude amounts to a denial of life itself. Culture extends and refines nature but, in the process, sets up its own tyranny. On another occasion, Bijagupta expounds a monistic doctrine in a discussion with Yashodhara's father, describing renunciation as not the opposite of attachment but only a change of the 'locus' of love. These conversations bring out the untenability of conventional oppositions and point to the need for a transcendental view of nature and culture, of asceticism and eroticism,

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according to which the whole is a dialectical synthesis of apparently antithetical elements.

Meanwhile, Chitralekha has gone to Kumaragiri's hermitage. They undergo a transformation: she becomes genuinely interested in spiritual life and he falls in love with her: the erotic urge becomes the ascetic quest and *vice versa*. It is now Kumaragiri who propounds the doctrine of attachment and love of an embodied being. He who calls himself the renouncer or the unattached man (*virāgī*) is, in fact, attached to the divine (*brahma*). The love of the divine must include the love of all beings. He tells Chitralekha that for him she is now the goal of his life. She, in turn, extols the virtue of self-control and advises him to try to conquer himself and not her—to try to seek the spirit and not the body. Finally, overwhelmed by desire, Kumaragiri lies to Chitralekha that Bijagupta has married Yashodhara. This is a blow Chitralekha finds hard to bear and, in her shock, she gives herself up to Kumaragiri.

Bijagupta is faced with his own moral choice. Considering himself free of any obligation to Chitralekha, who has left him of her own accord, he finds himself drawing emotionally closer to Yashodhara and contemplates marriage with her. He, however, learns from Shvetanka, his companion—the same person who has come to him to find out what *pāpa* is—that the latter is in love with Yashodhara. His first reaction is to ask Shevatanka to move out of his way, but then he changes his mind: he makes his choice guided by the value of self-sacrifice. He advises Yashodhara's father to marry her to Shvetanka. To make this possible, he transfers all his wealth and property to Shvetanka: in the process, he bestows the social rank of a feudal lord on the young man. Bijagupta thus becomes a renouncer himself. On learning of all this, and of Kumaragiri's deception to her, Chitralekha gives up Kumaragiri and her wealth, and joins Bijagupta in the quest of the spirit.

A year has passed since the guru sent out his two disciples to discover through their experience the significance of *pāpa*. They now return to him, each affirming the virtues of his own master. The guru points out to them that human beings are not autonomous moral agents at all; they are not free but engulfed in situations in the making of which they play no part. People neither commit sins nor perform meritorious acts:

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they simply do what they have to do, they make the choice dictated by their situation (*paristhiti*). The notion of 'situation' obviously includes the actor's own self as moulded by his or her previous choices. To that extent, I would suggest, one's situation includes the element of freedom.[5]

The moral discourse in *Chitralekha*, it seems to me, denies the validity of the notion of untrammelled free will, though not of moral choices as such. It clearly emphasizes the virtue of the concern of a moral agent for the well-being of others. (In this respect, the novelist goes against the logic of his own argument when, in the end, he equates Bijagupta and Kumaragiri in the moral balance.) The novel questions a simplistic notion of moral choices which opposes wickedness to merit, body to soul, and eroticism to asceticism. In *Samskara*, too, the focus is on the problematic moral agent, but the treatment of the question takes place along a different line of argument.

Authenticity as morality

The scene in *Samskara* is a Karnataka hamlet called Durvasapura; the time is, perhaps, the 1930s or '40s. It could have been any other time, any other century: Ramanujan, the translator, vividly calls it (in his Afterword) Indian Village Time. Legend links the village to the mythological figure Durvasa. It is well known because of this and because it is the home of two unusual Brahmans, Praneshacharya and Naranappa, the protagonists in the narrative.

Praneshacharya had, even when only a boy, unusual ideals: he wanted to be free of all passions. At the age of sixteen he chose to marry a twelve-year old girl born an invalid. He hoped thus to earn merit through austerity and self-sacrifice. He studied scriptures and went to Kashi where he earned encomiums. Since then his life has been spent in the performance of rituals, in study, in giving instruction to others, and in serving his invalid wife—all this in the spirit of duty, without concern for immediate reward. He hoards 'his penances like a

[5] Cf. the Upanishadic position as stated by Hiriyana (1949: 47): 'Freedom should be regarded as consisting not in unrestricted licence, but in being determined by oneself.' This is the same injunction as Matthew Arnold's call to be 'self-govern'd, at the feet of Law'.

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miser his money',[6] hoping ultimately to 'get ripe and ready' for the highest spiritual attainments. He has so completely overcome bodily appetites that, though his public readings of erotic tales from Sanskrit literature sometimes drive young men into sexual frenzy, he himself is totally unaffected by them. He is truly an ascetic. His fellow Brahman villagers, even those older than him, respect and honour him. His word is to them as authoritative as sacred scripture. He alone among them is the *ācārya*, teacher. The story opens with an occasion on which his advice is, indeed, very much needed.

Naranappa, who represents in the novel the erotic-epicurean human type, has died of plague and the Brahmans must decide how to cremate the corpse. Though born a Brahman, he had done everything a Brahman should not do. He had deserted his wife and taken a beautiful low-caste woman, Chandri, daughter of a prostitute, as his mistress. He not only lived with her in the hamlet but also ate food cooked by her, and had thus lost his ritual purity. He consumed meat and drank liquor. He ridiculed the rituals of fellow-Brahmans, threw into the river the holy idol that his kinsfolk had worshipped for generations, and dynamited the fish in the sacred temple pond. He 'corrupted' Brahman youth, enticing them into drama, dance and music. Naranappa had Muslim friends whom he brought into his house, and subsequently dared the Brahmans to excommunicate him so that he might become a Muslim. He repeatedly challenged Praneshacharya: 'Let's see who wins in the end—you or me.' And Praneshacharya had always hoped to win Naranappa back to good brahmanical ways and thus earn merit for himself.

While alive, Naranappa was an enemy of the Brahmans of Durvasapura. Now dead, he is a nuisance: till his body is cremated no adult in the hamlet may eat. He had never ceased to be a Brahman though he had not lived as one. Would it be all right for his kinsmen to cremate him? If not, who should

[6] Whereas I have avoided direct quotation from *Chitralekha* and *Yayati*, I have done otherwise in the case of *Samskara*. The reason for this is not merely the fact that the language of this essay and Ramanujan's translation of the novel are the same; more importantly it is the fact that the most crucial portion of *Samskara* is a presentation not of events or characters but of Praneshacharya's dialogue with himself, and it seemed best to preserve its flavour as captured by a gifted translator who is equally at home in both Kannada and English.

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do so? No non-Brahman could be allowed to touch a Brahman's dead body. This is the problem to which Pranesacharya is asked to find a solution. His task is complicated by the fact that if he decides to entrust the cremation to Naranappa's kinsmen, he must decide which of them is to do so: with the responsibility for cremation would go the right to the gold ornaments which Chandri, who received them from Naranappa, has offered to defray the funeral expenses. Praneshacharya retires to consult the texts for an answer but fails to find it by nightfall.

Not only have the Brahmans waited for Praneshacharya's verdict; Chandri, too, has patiently done so. Unable to withstand hunger, she goes into a banana grove, eats some fruit and drinks from the flowing stream. She is, in fact, part of the same bountiful nature to which the bananas and the flowing waters belong. She has lived all her life outside the laws of Brahmans: she has been an exception to all rules, ever-auspicious, daily-wedded, without widowhood and, in a sense, without sin or blame like the flowing river in which people wash their impurities and out of which they emerge purified.

Chandri awaits Praneshacharya's decision and thinks about his gentleness and kindness. She wonders whether this great teacher and ascetic has ever known anything about the body's pleasures. As yet childless, she recalls that her mother used to say that prostitutes should get pregnant by holy men such as Praneshacharya, who Chandri knows is virtuous and handsome. But it was not easy to be so blessed by such a man. She is woken from her reveries by the *ācārya* himself who comes out to return to her the gold ornaments: her generosity had only complicated matters. He gently reminds her that, though Naranappa is dead, she has her life to live and provide for.

The next day Praneshacharya decides to seek divine guidance in the Maruti temple. The Brahmans and Chandri wait, but there is no answer from the god, and the night falls a second time on the hamlet and on Naranappa's rotting body. Chandri has visited the banana grove again, to eat, but is now back outside the temple. Praneshacharya remembers his crippled wife and leaves the temple to minister to her needs. Chandri follows him in the forest, full of compassion and gratitude to him, distressed that he should suffer for her sake. She

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wants to touch his feet in reverence but ends up clutching his legs against her bosom. Praneshacharya, bewildered but full of pity for her, strokes her hair, but words fail him and he cannot utter the blessing. She rises to press him to herself.

'Touching full breasts he had never touched, Praneshacharya felt faint. As in a dream, he pressed them. The strength in his legs ebbing, Chandri sat the *ācārya* down, holding him close. The *ācārya*'s hunger, so far unconscious, suddenly raged, and he cried out like a child in distress, "O Amma!" Chandri leaned him against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them to him. Then she took off her sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on it hugging Praneshacharya close to her, weeping, flowing in helpless tears.'

They wake up from the experience with opposite feelings about it. Chandri hopes that she may have become pregnant and thus earned merit: 'a natural in pleasure, unaccustomed to self-reproach', she feels 'a sense of worthwhileness, like the fragrance of flowers hidden'. As for Praneshacharya, he knows he is lost. All the rules of culture that he had so assiduously learnt lie in ruins, and nature, manifested through hunger for food and sexual desire, triumphs. The sad fragility of the ascetic choice is revealed. He had always believed that no one chooses to be good, that some people—such as himself—are born with the good nature that leads them to make the right choices. This belief in inborn *guṇa*, too, is taken away from him.

Chandri goes home to the decomposing corpse. Unable to bear the situation any longer, she asks one of Naranappa's Muslim servants to cremate the body, which he does during the night without anybody else's knowledge. Chandri then leaves the village having fulfilled her roles, as it were, in the play.

Praneshacharya also goes back to his home and his dependent wife and to the anxious Brahmans. He is filled with remorse but also experiences 'a lightness in the thought' that he is now 'a free man, relieved by the prostitute of his responsibility to lead the way, relieved of all authority', of the burden of being the guru and the *ācārya*. A Sanskrit chant which he had learnt by heart and recited daily, rises in his mind: 'I am sin, my work is sin, my soul is sin, my birth is in sin.' But he then

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thinks: 'No, no, even that is a lie. Must forget all words learned by heart, the heart must flow free like a child's.' This represents a return to spontaneity, to nature, and a resolve to break with memory, with culture: it is a bid for escape from the tyranny of culture. 'Even if he had left desire, desire had not left him.'[7]

The lives of Praneshacharya and Naranappa are strangely but significantly a mirror-image of each other. Naranappa, too, had left his brahmanical culture, but brahmanical culture had not left him. The body in relation to culture is, the novelist implies, the source of the problem in both cases, the body pulsating with desire no less than the body rotting away; the one polluted and the other polluting.

Praneshacharya's ties with the Brahman community are already snapped in his own eyes. He tells them, 'I'm lost. I couldn't get Maruti to say anything. I know nothing. You do whatever your hearts say.' The Brahmans decide to seek the advice of another *ācārya* elsewhere, and leave Praneshacharya to his memories and reflections.

'So far he didn't even live; doing only what was done, chanting the same old mantra, he had remained inexperienced. Experience is risk, assault. A thing not done before, a joining in the dark of the jungle. . . . Just as he had received the touch of woman, did Naranappa receive the touch of God in the dark, unbidden?' (This is comparable to the notion of 'cloistered virtue' in the Western tradition.) Had not Naranappa once taunted him that, if only Brahmans would be like the sages of their holy legends and eat food cooked by low-caste women and make love to them, they would experience God? Dualities must, then, be meaningless and all choices expressions of moral arrogance.

Praneshacharya remembers his childhood fascination for alternately swimming in the river and drying himself on the hot sand. The long repressed body comes alive and his senses reawaken. He rushes to the spot where he and Chandri had united and smells the grass on which they had lain and made love. This is a most remarkable passage in the novel, in which an entire orchestra of senses are shown awakened in unison,

[7] Ron Inden and Kanti Shah have drawn my attention to comparable notions in nineteenth-century European romanticism.

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rising to a crescendo. But the hold of culture is only loosened, not cast off: the *ācārya* again remembers his wife. He goes home to find her dead: plague has claimed her too, totally impartial between a sinner and a saint's blameless wife. Without more ado, he takes her body away for cremation.

He does not return home, leaves everything behind and sets off from Durvasapura, going wherever his feet might take him, thinking he is now free, without duties or debts. He does not even want to remember God, just stand alone. But can one do so? 'Whatever his decision, his feet still walked him close to the habitations of men. This is the limit of his world, his freedom.' Being free and alone is also self-deception, just as being chained to cultural rules and fellow human beings is. Is one totally helpless, then, at the mercy of circumstances? His 'moment' with Chandri had just happened, by God's will, as it were.

'Even if I lost control, the responsibility to decide was still mine. Man's decision is valid because it is possible to lose control, not because it is easy. We shape ourselves through our choices, bring form and line to this thing we call our person. Naranappa became the person he chose to be. I chose to be something else and lived by it. But suddenly I turned at some turning. I'm to answer for it. What happened at that turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. . . . How did the ancient sages face such experiences? Without dualities, conflict? One wonders . . .'. One can, perhaps, remake oneself 'in full wakefulness', but what moral authority does one have to include another's life in one's decision? 'O God, take from me the burden of decision' is Praneshacharya's anguished prayer, uttered in total loneliness.[8]

Praneshacharya, at the end of the story, waits, 'anxious, expectant'. *Samskara* ends on this note—the characteristic existentialist possibility or impasse. As Ramanujan puts it (in his Afterword), 'the novel ends, but does not conclude'.

[8] I have omitted mention of various incidents involving Praneshacharya during the day after his departure from Durvasapura; his thought process, as described in the novel, seemed more important to me for the purpose of this essay. It may be stated here, however, that these incidents sharpen Praneshacharya's consciousness of the oppressiveness of culture, of alienation, on the one hand, and of the impossibility of a retreat into himself, withdrawn from society, on the other.

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Anantha Murthy suggests authenticity, rather than an opposition between body and spirit, between eroticism and asceticism, as the ultimate criterion of moral choices. He does not share Bhagvaticharan Varma's passive attitude towards situations. He also implies the virtue of transcendence as the way out of dualities, though he considers its realization highly problematic. Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar, however, asserts it confidently and at length in *Yayati*.

Transcending moral choice-making through detachment

Yayati is based on an episode in the great epic poem Mahabharata which is also found in the Bhagavata and several other puranic texts. The locale is Hastinapur and the time mythological. Yayati is a king's son. When still a young boy, his mother had made him promise that he would never abandon his home. The reason for this rather curious request was that her elder son, Yati (*yati* actually means 'ascetic' or renouncer) had already done so. He had learnt of the curse, pronounced on his father by a sage whom he had insulted, to the effect that his children would never be happy. The prospect of an unhappy life had led Yati to decide to become a sannyasi, though he was then only a teenager. This had happened before Yayati's birth. Yayati had promised his mother that he would become a victorious warrior, never a renouncer. The boy had a romantic streak in him and might well have become a poet, but he strove hard to fulfil his royal destiny and his martial choice. The instruction he received from his elders on the importance of temporal power and the worthwhileness of worldly life helped him in his endeavour.

Yayati, now a brave and talented young man, well versed in everything a prince ought to know, persuades his father to perform *aśvamedha*, the horse sacrifice of 'world' conquest and victory. He follows the horse all over the country to protect it against capture. In the course of these wanderings he has an encounter in a forest with a recluse engaged in the mortification of his body. The recluse talks to Yayati about the unworthiness of princes for they are usually given to soul-killing sensual pleasures. This yogi turns out to be Yati.

Yayati asks Yati what his quest is, why he is subjecting himself to the ordeal of *haṭhayoga*, eating only bitter fruit and

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roots and sleeping on thorns. Yati answers that the body is a human being's worst enemy, for he who devotes himself to the body's rapture never experiences spiritual joy. To vanquish the body and win control over one's senses is, however, far more difficult than killing one's enemies and winning royal victories. The implications of the ascetic as against the royal choices are thus apparent.

Yayati's next encounter is with a gifted young man like himself, Kach, son of the great sage Brihaspati, guru of the gods. Kach teaches Yayati a different doctrine from that of Yati. The body's rapture is natural and no immorality attaches to it so long as the body is held subordinate to the spirit. Nature is not to be denied: it should be reshaped by culture. The goals of life (*puruṣārtha*), Kach says, do not exclude rational worldly pursuits (*artha*), nor aesthetic and sensual pleasures (*kāma*) either, but these must be subsumed under righteous conduct (*dharma*). Encompassed in moral conduct, worldly pursuits are worthwhile and, indeed, moral. The *dharma* of the king, or of the ordinary householder is in no way morally inferior to renunciation. The ultimate human quest, whatever one's station in life, however, should be to rise above the body and sensual pleasures and strive for spiritual fulfilment and joy (*ānanda*).

But Yayati is a prince and he soon learns to appreciate bodily pleasures. Wine and the experience of carnal love fill his life. And then, on his father's death, he becomes the king of Hastinapur. Meanwhile, Kach has become a pupil of the great sage Shukracharya, guru of the daemons. He has many virtues: knowledge, wisdom, confidence, humility, gentleness of disposition, and, above all, concern for others combined with non-attachment.

Shukracharya's daughter, Devayani, falls in love with Kach. Though he is also attracted to her, he avoids her, for his quest is of the spirit. He also wins the affection and respect of Sharmishtha, daughter of the king of daemons. He tells her of his quest. He confesses to her his love for Devayani but adds that true ennobling love must make one look beyond one's own self. The fulfilment of moral obligation is the highest virtue. Love is thus not to be opposed to duty but absorbed into it.

Subsequently, Devayani meets Yayati by chance and asks

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him to marry her, which he does after some initial hesitance. Sharmishtha, who has been a friend of Devayani, is obliged to become the latter's maid in punishment for an impulsive act of defiance. The conjugal life of the royal couple has a troubled beginning because of differences in the life-styles of the Brahman wife and the Kshatriya husband. Yayati, nevertheless, finds much happiness in his physical relationship with Devayani, so much so that he cannot bear to think of giving it up. His quest for understanding and love, however, remains unfulfilled. The union of Yayati and Devayani is a meeting of two bodies but not of two souls.

Finding the occasion for a ritual performance, Devayani invites Kach, whom she has never quite ceased to love nor forgiven for refusing to marry her, to her husband's court. He arrives with Yati, who behaves in a manner which others find difficult to understand and they judge him to be mad. For instance, he wants Sharmishtha to be given to him so that he transform her into a 'man'. Later, some people claim they saw him walk across the flooded river at night and leave the city. Obviously, Yati has acquired the superhuman powers of a *haṭhayogi* but has failed to come to terms with human nature. Woman's very being appears a great threat to him.

Kach provides an explanation for Yati's strange behaviour. Yati's view of life is unfortunately flawed inasmuch as it is mono-dimensional. His early decision to try to find God has resulted in the death of the human being in him. Human life is based on pairs of opposites or *dvandva* (which could be mutually reinforcing or destructive), and he who denies this fundamental principle is bound to come to grief. It is true that the sannyasi finds spiritual joy only when he succeeds in transcending dualities; even so, one must begin with the recognition that both the terms of a duality are equally important. The problem is not to separate them but to establish a proper relationship between them at a higher, transcendent level. The soul, after all, resides in the body and not independently of it. Yati's mistake is that he denies part of his own being, that which belongs to the domain of nature.

Man acquires merit not by denying the existence of the body and its appetites, but by refining them and bringing them under the control of his will (*saṁyama*). The mature or

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cultured person is one who has distanced himself from nature but not broken away from it. Reason must always command the senses: it must encompass them. One who posits a sharp dichotomy between body and soul has a distorted view of life. Man is the very best, the finest, link between nature and culture. Dualities are not an attribute of the domain of nature, and god (*brahma*) and the domain of the spirit are beyond them. It follows that dualities are an attribute of human intelligence and, therefore, the basis for moral judgement. The only viable view of human life is one based on a balanced and harmonized relationship (*santulan*) between the body, the mind and the soul.

Kach's logic is lost on Yayati and Devayani. Their temperaments continue to be wide apart, though they live together. Yayati finds understanding from Sharmishtha and mutual love develops between them. They marry secretly—doing so being permissible (*gandharva vivāha*)—and Devayani knows nothing about their relationship. Both women give birth to sons. Devayani has her suspicions about Yayati's relationship with the other woman, and he senses this. Fearing that Devayani might have Sharmishtha and her son murdered, Yayati arranges to have them sent away from the city. There is complete estrangement between him and Devayani, who succeeds in finding out the truth about the relationship between the two lovers. She therefore forbids Yayati to touch her body. The bodies separated, their relationship loses its sole basis and is reduced to a mere arrangement.

For the next eighteen years Yayati makes bodily pleasures the constitutive principle of his life. He lives by a simple hedonistic doctrine: there is no merit or sin in human life, only pleasure (*sukha*) or pain (*dukha*). He pursues pleasure but never finds happiness. *Mṛgayā* (hunting), *madirā* (wine) and, above all, *madirākṣī* (woman) become his principal preoccupations. The more he indulges in dissipation, the more insatiable his desires become.

Yayati now becomes Yati's opposite and, like him, a deranged person, losing all sense of the supreme value of balance in human life and therefore unable to judge his own moral condition. 'Am I in heaven—or am I in hell?' is the question he asks himself. Reflecting on his condition he comes to formu-

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late the distinction between worldly happiness and spiritual joy. He realizes that his mistake has been the unbridled pursuit of pleasure. He contrasts his life with that of Kach who, too, had been attracted to Devayani. But Kach had placed his moral obligation towards others above his personal happiness.

Yayati's life is completely reshaped at this stage by a curse. Devayani's father, Shukracharya, emerges from meditation to find what Yayati has done to himself and his wife. He asks for an explanation and Yayati tells him that his has been the foolishness of youth, whereupon the sage curses him and Yayati suddenly becomes a very old man. The desires and hopes of a younger man, however, remain alive in his wizened frame. Shukracharya is, happily, persuaded to relent and he promises that Yayati can get back his youth if someone related to him by blood will exchange his own youthful body for the king's aged one.

Shukracharya's coming to Hastinapur has coincided with the return of Devayani's son, the prince Yadu, from a battle in which he was taken prisoner but later released when the enemy was defeated by Sharmishtha's son, Puru. Puru, who lives outside Hastinapur, is aware of his parentage and blood ties with Yadu, and has rushed to obtain his release from his enemies. Yadu brings Puru to the court without knowing who he is. Yayati asks Yadu if he will exchange his body with his own and succeed him immediately as king. Yadu refuses this favour, but Puru offers his body, declaring that he is Yayati's and Sharmishtha's son. The wish having been expressed and accepted, Yayati becomes young again and Puru is instantly transformed into an old man.

Remorse now seizes Yayati. Kach's yogic powers, however, help to restore the original bodily condition of Puru. Kach reminds Yayati that culture, which has no place in the life of animals but seems so important in human life, in fact alters man only superficially. Man must therefore be ever vigilant to maintain the control of his will over the senses and realize the futility of a life ordered to an exclusive fulfilment of human desires.[9] It is

[9] The story of Yayati in the traditional texts has many ramifications (see, for example, O'Flaherty 1976: 237–43), with which I am not concerned here. Thus, according to a widely read popular presentation of the Mahabharata, Yayati does not suffer from any feeling of immediate remorse but spends many more years

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thus suggested by Vishnu Khandekar that the only true moral basis of worldly life can be self-sacrifice, which is what detachment (*virakti*) is really all about, and not self-seeking. It is through detachment rather than formal renunciation that all dualities are transcended.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In the foregoing presentation of three moral discourses, I have made an attempt to present some related conceptualizations of an Indian view of moral choices. These formulations proceed characteristically and contrary to the Western sociological tradition, from personal-soteriological towards social-ethical concerns, rather than the other way round. According to this view, though criteria for such choices are available (for instance, self-sacrifice for the good of others), the ideal that human beings should ultimately strive for is the attainment of a level of self-consciousness (*ātma-jñāna*) which transcends the need for moral choices of the either/or kind. This is *mokṣa*, release from volition. Max Weber, Albert Schweitzer and many other Western scholars have dismissed this as moral quietism, but it does not appear as such to Hindus.

Such a view of moral choices can be traced back to Upanishadic philosophy (see Radhakrishnan 1953: 15–145 *et passim*) and is also stated in the Bhagavad Gita, the most widely read Hindu scripture.[10] I am, of course, not suggesting that the novels on which this essay is based are formal expositions of

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engrossed in worldly enjoyments. Later he goes to the splendorous garden of Kubera, the lord of wealth, and lives there in the company of a celestial courtesan. Finally, 'wisdom' dawns on him and he returns to his son and tells him: 'Dear son, sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence any more than fire is by pouring ghee in it. I had heard and read this, but till now I had not realized it. No object of desire—corn, gold, cattle or women—nothing can ever satisfy the desire of man. We can reach peace only by a mental poise beyond likes and dislikes. Such is the state of Brahman. Take back your youth and rule the kingdom wisely and well' (Rajagopalachari 1968: 38).

[10] Cf.: 'The dualism between body and spirit is not radical. Without maltreating the body we can attain the freedom of the spirit . . .' (Radhakrishnan 1940: 98). Again: 'We are not called upon to crush the natural impulses of human life. . . . The aim of ascetic discipline is the sanctification of the entire personality' (ibid.: 99).

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transcendentalism, or accurate ones, but only indicating that a major source of influence in the fragmented consciousness of contemporary Hindu intellectuals continues to be an ancient one. It is an influence which one also detects in Sanskrit poetry and drama, in which the moral life reflects the merger of earthly and heavenly loves (Hindery 1978: 157–76 *et passim*).

The scope of this essay is, however, deliberately confined to the consideration of moral choices in some contemporary literary texts and in the specific context of the nature–culture dichotomy as manifested in the choice of an erotic or an ascetic mode of life. It is important to note here that in either case it is his or her whole being which should be the actor's main concern. The human body is a key symbol which bridges nature and culture but does not by itself constitute the totality of being. Any effort to locate the body exclusively in either of these two domains is a bad choice, for it is bound to fail. But this bridge is no simple architectural concept. The close but complex relationship between eroticism and asceticism has long been recognized in Indian thought: it has characteristically found rich expression in Hindu mythology, particularly in the Shiva and Krishna myths.[11]

All three discourses, then, question a simplistic dualistic conception of the moral domain and, therefore, of the viability of choices which are based on a simple-minded opposition of *pāpa* and *puṇya*. It is shown that those who seek the latter are dogged by the former, and those who seem morally derelict turn out to be worthy of being the recipients of divine grace. Each novel opens with a categorization of characters and actions as immoral or otherwise but, as the narrative proceeds, reversals take

[11] Generalizing from the ascetic and erotic aspects of the mythology of Shiva, O'Flaherty (1975: 315) writes: 'The ancient Indian knew well the Faustian lust for the full experience of the most diverse possibilities of human life; the Buddha saw this thirst as the cause of all human misery but the Hindus did not dismiss it so easily. They recognized a constant tension between the desire to sample every aspect of experience and the desire to exhaust at least one by plumbing its depths. Thus every human action involves a choice, and every choice implies a loss.' I am struck by this author's attempt to oppose the Western tendency of forcing a choice between opposites to the Hindu's willingness to live with dualities; it seems to me that she underplays the problem of levels and the importance of transcendence, which of course is not synthesis, for the Hindu. This could hardly be explained adequately by citing her preoccupation with mythology rather than metaphysics, for the two are not unrelated in Hindu thought.

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place and each crucial character is transformed into the opposite type, with the very notable exception of Kach in *Yayati*, who is an embodiment of the wisdom of transcendentalism. Thus, the opposition between Kumaragiri and Bijagupta, between Praneshacharya and Naranappa, and somewhat less dramatically between Yati and Yayati, is sustained from the beginning to the bitter end through this process of inversion. The option for devotion to spiritual pursuits, that is, for asceticism, which may at first blush appear good and laudable, leads each seeker to his own particular experience of disastrous and painful failure.

Kumaragiri, whose worst faults are his preoccupation with himself, his egotism (*ahaṁkāra*), falls so low indeed that he resorts to deceit to satisfy his aroused erotic desires. While his life lies in ruins, Bijagupta emerges as the true renouncer, because he has always been one through his concern for others. Similarly, Praneshacharya seeks merit and god through a well-regulated life—though a householder, he is an ascetic—only to discover its emptiness. This leads him to suspect, if not believe, that Naranappa, the voluptuary who flouted all rules, may after all have been the one to find god. Yati, too, sets out to discover god but all he finds is loneliness, thorns and bitter fruit, and ends up being a deranged person. Yayati, on the other hand, draws up the programme of his life in terms of the pursuit of pleasure and comes to grief. Both of them have to be taught the lesson of the importance of harmonization of opposites, and the moral arrogance (or stupidity) of either/or choices.

The trap of binary oppositions is everybody's misfortune. While Kumaragiri and Bijagupta are Brahman and Kshatriya respectively, Praneshacharya and Naranappa are both Brahmans of the same sect, and Yati and Yayati are even closer, brothers sharing common substance. The victim carries no prior mark other than his humanity. By questioning commonly accepted moral judgements, such as the one which places high value on asceticism and denigrates eroticism, the discourses create what may be called 'moral suspense' or 'moral perplexity'. If the option which is obviously good is not in fact so, how then does one make one's moral choices? Three solutions to this problem are suggested in the novels.

Chitralekha takes the stand that all choices are a snare, that

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dualities are an illusion, and that one must therefore seek a state of consciousness in which one's vision is so enlarged that one is able to rise above the domain of choice-making. The situations in which human beings are placed in worldly life are far more powerful than they. This realization must not be allowed to lead to quietism or, worse, nihilism. The wise do not seek merit through moral choices of the either/or kind, but through transcendence, which is not the same as synthesis. Morality is not an external condition, a mere attribute of human conduct, but an inner wisdom, a mental state, from which all our acts should flow naturally without an effort of will.[12]

The second solution, which is perhaps better described as an 'anti-solution', is provided in *Samskara*. The man who will follow where his bodily appetites lead him is no more a thing blown around in the wind than the man who lives by mechanically-learnt rules. Both deny that the essence of human life lies in its possibilities. It is therefore not the kind of life one leads that is so important to a person's moral stature as the consciousness of purpose and procedure that he or she is able to bring into it. As Jung would put it, the way to personal truth may lie only through an inferno of passions. This is why Naranappa may have been touched by God but Praneshacharya was not.

The human being as a fully conscious or autonomous moral agent (a Socrates-like figure) is, then, the ideal *Samskara* puts forward; but it is an ideal difficult to realize, for no human being living in society may hope to make all his or her own choices without taking away from the autonomy of others. Moral choices thus generate moral dilemmas with no easy solutions. Perhaps exceptionally gifted persons such as the ancient sages, whom one may call moral heroes, were able to solve this problem by learning to transcend dualities, including the opposition between cultural determination and free will, but what about ordinary people? Like Praneshacharya, they may only wait—anxious, expectant.

[12] Such a 'mental state' may well appear as a regrettable condition in another cultural tradition. Thus: 'There is a kind of disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our facts spring as from a reservoir (Wittgenstein 1964: 143).

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Yayati introduces into this discussion a third solution. It begins with the idealist argument, namely that morality is tied up with one's station in life and its attendant duties. This is rather like the formulation about 'situations' in *Chitralekha*. Moral choices, according to this argument, are socially given and, therefore, known, They are summed up in the *dharma* appropriate to one's social group (*varṇa*), stage of life (*āśrama*), place (*sthāna*) and time (*kāla*). Thus the householder must live by the morality of *puruṣārtha*, as given in the three values (*trivarga*) of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. A harmonious structuring in hierarchical complementarity of the activities that these values betoken, with *dharma* encompassing *artha* and *kāma*, is the recommended moral choice for the man-in-the-world.[13] Though none of the three novels is about the life of the householder (Praneshacharya with his world-view and the invalid, childless wife is and yet is not one), *gārhasthya* as a moral condition emerges at the centre of the discourses, though only by implication. The householder combines in himself, and mediates between, both the ascetic and the erotic ideals. In this lies his cultural significance.

It is important to note that the foregoing solution of harmonization of opposites is not quite the same as Aristotle's notion of the 'golden mean', nor is it an effort to arrive at a simple synthesis. Neither should it be confused with the various projects of the neo-Freudians to restore dignity to the human body (Brown 1959), to bring love and reason together (Bettelheim 1961), or to strive for autonomy, the assertion of individuality and the practice of the common good (Arieti 1972). Similarly, it should be distinguished from the contemporary anthropological effort to underscore the cultural construction of nature, including the human body (see, e.g., Schneider 1968). Important though these approaches to the resolution of the nature–culture opposition are, they are meaningful primarily within Western philosophical traditions. The harmonization of opposites mentioned in *Yayati* is related, rather, to the

[13] Cf: 'There are three "human ends", *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, duty, profit and pleasure. All three are (necessary and) lawful, but they are so graded in a hierarchy that an inferior ideal may be pursued only as far as a superior one does not intervene: *dharma* . . . is more important than *artha* . . . which, in turn, is above *kāma* . . .' (Dumont 1960: 41). Also see above, fn. 12 on p. 33.

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other solution, namely transcendence, proposed for the sannyasi: *the former is, in fact, a step leading to the latter*, and it is important to emphasize this fact.

Transcendence is a complex concept and, it seems to me, much misunderstood. Following the clues available in *Yayati*, and developing them, it could be said to refer to raising the level of being in order to free it from the conflict of dualities. This is the ancient goal (rather than object) of *saṁskṛti*, the bringing into being of the mature, refined person. Nothing is discarded or excluded in this process of refinement: everything is included, improved and carried forward into one integrated experience. In this experience eroticism exists no more nor less than does asceticism. The goal is to connect them, to establish a proper relationship between them. The relationship alone is real in the same sense in which the truth of the trader's balance lies in the even beam and not in either of the two pans or their contents.

Transcendence, then, bestows on one the holistic vision that sees all in terms of mutual relatedness in a framework of values. It thus frees the human being from the need to make choices. The duality between the householder and the renouncer, suggested in *Yayati*, is also dissolved, as, according to the notion of *āśrama*, every *gṛhastha* is ultimately expected to become a sannyasi. It is in this sense that renunciation is, as Dumont so aptly calls it, 'a sort of universal language in India' (1970: 52). *Yayati* thus upholds the notion of transcendence as the supreme value in the moral domain, and suggests a solution to the ethical relativism of *Chitralekha* and the existentialist's agonizing, his trembling in the face of choice-making, so poignantly portrayed in *Samskara*.[14]

The three discourses discussed here contain a number of bipolar concepts which are all apparently transformations of the basic opposition between nature and culture. Thus, there are conceptualizations of biopsychological states (body–soul/spirit, youth–old age, woman–man, madness/folly–sanity/wisdom, pleasure–joy, pleasure–pain), of social types (householder/king–sannyasi, prostitute–wife, *bhogī–yogī*), of human conduct (eroti-

[14] It is indeed puzzling that Carl Jung (1977: 306) should have thought that the condition of *nirdvandva* does not refer to moral perfection. This underscores the whole issue of the problems of cross-cultural communication.

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cism–asceticism, acceptance of worldly goals–renunciation, search for knowledge through experience–quest for intuitive knowledge), and of moral values (*pāpa–puṇya*, *nīti–dharma*, life affirmation–life denial). Whereas a correspondence between biopsychological states, social types and modes of conduct may be readily established, doing the same between these, on the one hand, and the moral value pairs, on the other, is problematic. Thus it is a woman, and significantly a woman living outside the rules of society, a Chitralekha or a Chandri, who becomes the instrument employed to reclaim ascetics like Kumaragiri and Praneshacharya for the domain of nature. Such a woman is supposed to live in sin but, judging by the turn of events in the novels, does she really? Yayati is, of course, a king and not a sannyasi: even in his spiritual evolution it is not his queen but 'the other woman', Sharmishtha, who plays the crucial positive role. Looked at in this way, the discourses, once again, point to the importance of transcendence, of perceiving nature and culture as a unity.[15]

The above discussion suggests, I think, that the anthropological study of moral choices in South Asian societies will be enriched if it is carried out in the light of native categories of thought. Such categories do not, of course, provide the anthropologist with readymade answers, but without them he himself may not give any that are significant. Moreover, such an approach will generate insights into people's observable behaviour which may lead to conclusions about it that are significantly different from those flowing from a Eurocentric view of moral choices. Some students of comparative philosophy have already noted that the ultimate concern of the Hindu is not

[15] Ramanujan rightly remarks in the Translator's Note that, '*Samskara* takes its title seriously'; he translates it as 'a rite for a dead man' in the context of the novel. I would prefer to emphasize, in the context of this essay, that other first meaning of the word *samskara* which, quoting from the epigraph provided by Ramanujan, refers to the 'forming well or thoroughly, making perfect' of human beings. *Samskara* goes with *saṁskṛiti* (culture) as opposed to *prakṛiti* (nature). It points to the process of maturation, of moral perfectibility.

Some readers may wonder if *Samskara* is really comparable to *Chitralekha* and *Yayati* in view of the influence of Western philosophy and literature on Anantha Murthy. I am not too bothered about this because, for one thing, his novel is a modern Hindu intellectual's work and, secondly, the experience of existentialist distress has not been unknown to Indian thinkers.

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with choice, which is imprisonment, but with freedom (Potter 1963: 1–24 *et passim*).[16] Far from implying a rejection of Western philosophical traditions as irrelevant because they are external, or an acceptance of Indian philosophical traditions as sufficient because they are internal, this essay is an effort to reaffirm the dialectical nature of anthropological knowledge.

[16] See the Introduction for the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti's statement of the notion of freedom from choice-making.

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4

THE DESIRED AND THE GOOD

> . . . it is well for him who takes hold of the 'good', but he who chooses the 'desired' fails in his aim.
>
> KATHA UPANISHAD

> As you would not like to change something very beautiful . . . so do not put obstacles in the way of suffering. Allow it to ripen, for with its flowering understanding comes.
>
> J. KRISHNAMURTI

In the course of studying the Pandits of Kashmir I have detected among them an abiding concern with the problem of suffering (*duḥkha*). While suffering has a physical aspect, it is its mental and emotional aspects which are emphasized by them. Everyday speech is replete with references to the varieties of suffering which the Pandits consider to be the lot of humankind. Though they bemoan its wide prevalence, and express bewilderment in respect of particular cases, they do not consider suffering in general ununderstandable, for they subscribe to the notion of the 'fruits of action' (*karma-phala*): one deserves what one gets in life, no matter how deep the suffering. While there is much mutual sympathy, there is also the exhortation that one should submit to suffering in a spirit of resignation, seek to ensure a better future through righteousness of thought and action, and leave the rest to divine blessing (*anugraha*).

Given the concern with human suffering, which the Pandits doubtless share with peoples everywhere, they also expatiate on the causes of it. These are seen as being multiple and, indeed, as belonging to different ontological levels. Generally speaking, suffering is considered to be the result of wrong actions which, in turn, may be traced to a moral infirmity of some kind. Ultimately, however, wrongdoing is believed to

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result from ignorance and delusion (*moha-māyā*) and egotism (*ahaṁkāra*). The individual sufferer is, therefore, always exhorted to improve his understanding of the true nature of things and happenings and, above all, of his own *potential for goodness*. The divine is immanent in the human, the Pandits aver; in fact, he who attains moral perfection knows that he is divine. It is not, however, given to everyone to attain such perfection. It requires ceaseless endeavour directed towards self-improvement (maturation) and is ultimately a divine gift.

The call to make choices in ordering one's life in terms of what are generally acknowledged in Pandit culture as moral imperatives is not an occasional challenge, therefore, but an everyday responsibility for most people. A well-known guide to the making of the right choices is the Upanishadic dichotomy of the 'desired' (*preyas*) and the 'good' (*śreyas*). As the Pandits see it, the pursuit of worldly gains and pleasures—of *artha* and *kāma*—is perfectly legitimate provided it is carried out in accordance with righteousness (*dharma*). In other words, the 'desired' and the 'good' are not to be opposed to each other but integrated in an enlarged moral sensibility. *Preyas* must be brought under the sovereignty of *śreyas*, and *śreyas* may be realized through an affirmation of worldly goals and not necessarily through their denial. The Pandit ideology of the householder gives expression to such a view of the good life.[1]

At the highest level of moral discipline, or spiritual endeavour, there is the Brahmanical ideal of the final ending of ignorance (*avidyā*) through attaining the state of transcendence in life. One who attains such a level of human perfection does not suffer from the agony of having to face moral dilemmas; he is freed from having to make choices. For such a self-aware person, the goal is the joy (*ānanda*) of *being* good rather than seeking *to become* good. In the words of the well-known contemporary philosopher, J. Krishnamurti, such a person lives in 'choiceless awareness'.[2]

But how many ordinary people, ask the Pandits, may hope to attain such perfection (*siddhi*)? They see most human lives as tales of moral infirmity, some more so than others. Those who are found wanting in moral virtue are not, however, left without hope. 'Nobody goes astray for ever': this maxim is

[1] See Chapter 1. [2] See above, p. 13.

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said to be one of the basic truths of human existence. A person can and should try to repair the damaged moral fabric of his life but the mode of atonement (*prāyaścitta*) varies from person to person. Cultural injunctions do not bind the moral agent absolutely, nor is there scope for full freedom or originality in a person's response to his predicament. These variations in modes of atonement tell us more about the 'moral space' available within one's culture than about individual idiosyncrasies.

Wrong-doing does not, of course, take place in a social vacuum: interpersonal relations of the most intimate kind—such as those between wife and husband or parent and child—are their principal locus. In fact, it is in the context of such primal settings that the agony of choice-making comes out most explicitly and poignantly, for these relations are seen by the Pandits as being governed by moral imperatives rather than being subject to human choice. Moreover, different degrees of wrong-doing are recognized, ranging from the ordinarily faulty actions (*aparādha*, *doṣa*) to those which are judged as morally reprehensible and evil (*pāpa*). The nature and extent of the effort needed to restore the moral balance of one's life is understandably seen as being dependent upon the magnitude of one's lapse.

What is true of the Pandits is likely to be broadly true of other Brahman communities also. In this chapter I explore further some of the ideas presented above very briefly, by drawing upon the insights provided by a contemporary Tamil novel about a south Indian Brahman community. I hasten to add that, apart from some very minor details, the Pandits would, in my judgement, find nothing in this novel—no incident and no moral judgement—lying outside the range of possibility in their own midst. I have chosen T. Janakiraman's *The Sins of Appu's Mother*'[3] rather than an ethnographic text, because it deals with certain kinds of moral issues which have not been

[3] The original title of the novel, *Amma Vantal*, would read 'Mother came' in English. It is noteworthy that it is not Janakiraman but the translator, M. Krishnan, who emphasizes the word 'sin' by putting it into the title of the novel. I have been told by the novelist's daughter, Uma Shankari, that, as far as she knows, the novelist was on the whole satisfied with the translation. A. K. Ramanujan tells me, however, that the translation leaves much to be desired.

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taken up for study by sociologists or anthropologists in India. The reason for this lacuna in ethnographic literature may well be that such moral issues and the choices they entail are not readily available to the scrutiny of the student who would seek to understand them only from without—as behaviour, perhaps—independent of the cultural constructs of the people which embody thought and feeling. This is not to deny the existence and importance of cross-cultural moral imperatives, but to stress that such 'universals' must necessarily be experienced as 'particulars' by the actors. And the ethnographic method encourages us to concentrate on the moral acts of a people when we would seek to explicate the notion of morality in their culture.

Turning to the novel, then, we learn that Appu is his mother's third and last legitimate child. Alankaram—for that is her name—has three other children, but their father is not the same as Appu's, namely Dandapani, but a client of his called Shivasu. Dandapani is an astrologer and a scholar of ancient texts. He is a nondescript Brahman who makes a living as a proof-reader in a printing press and by teaching Sanskrit texts to elderly and retired city gentlemen. He lives a humdrum life with his wife and children in a tenement situated in a lane in Madras. Performing ablutions, offering prayers, eating, and working—these appear to be the activities that consume him, just as they constitute the everyday life of most Brahmans everywhere. In his youth he too had known conjugal pleasures, but these had later been taken away from him irrevocably by Alankaram, who preferred Shivasu; and Dandapani chose to put up with this liaison and the children born of it. She had made a culturally forbidden choice and he had acquiesced in it. Both acted stealthily and in bad conscience, for neither questioned the cultural norms in the light of which they were wrong-doers.

Unlike her husband, Alankaram is a rather extraordinary character, aptly named Alankaram, for the word means 'ornament'. Somehow, muses Dandapani on one occasion after discovering her perfidy, her parents had not given her the name of a Hindu goddess, which is the common practice among orthodox Brahmans, but one more like that of a courtesan.

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Alankaram is a tall, well-built, physically attractive woman, and, though not well-read, a person of imagination and a strong will. There is a touch of the arrogant and even the regal about her, and she dominates the scene wherever she is by her natural grace and poise.

> She sat majestically in her chair, in that tenement, in that cattle-yard lane, like a queen on her throne. In her smile and speech and the way she turned and walked she was regal. She never pleaded and she never bargained. And she never spoke at needless length. (p. 102)

> She would look in wonder at the stars and see in their constellations shapes that he could never make out clearly, no matter how explicitly she pointed them out [to Dandapani, lying beside her on the terrace of their house]. There was something childlike in her wonder at the stars, the shapes she could see in them, even in the way she lay still on her back staring at them. . . . It was not only her star-gazing; her dreams too were extraordinary; vivid, colourful and detailed. They were peopled by strange characters and beings and mythological figures with everything larger than life. His own dreams seemed so mundane and poverty-stricken by comparison . . . (p.72)

Appu was Alankaram's favourite child and she paid special attention to his upbringing. When he was eight years old, and in school, Alankaram revealed to her husband her 'deep wish to give him a real education' (p. 75). Dandapani agreed and spoke of Appu going to the university and perhaps becoming a teacher or an engineer, but she dismissed such ideas as commonplace.

> He must learn the Vedas. He must study them intensely and shine with their effulgence. Like fire he should burn up all pettiness and dross that come near him and should stand like a god; like Brihaspati. (p. 76)[4]

Dandapani's pleas that a Vedic scholar cannot hope to make a decent living are brushed aside. Appu can acquire a more utilitarian education later on—but first the Vedas. Sixteen years later, Appu, an adept in Vedic scholarship, back from the village where he studied the sacred texts and looking for work to do, expresses his own doubts about the self-sufficiency of such knowledge. Alankaram admonishes him in reply:

[4] Brihaspati is the preceptor, counsellor, and chief priest of the Vedic gods.

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If one reads the Vedas one's mind and body are purified and acquire an effulgence. No illness or anxiety can touch such a person, for he becomes like a flower—an undying, ever fresh flower. . . . Nobody will let a [Vedic scholar become just a mean, beggarly priest]. Don't go grubbing for money and your study will look after you. (pp. 102–3)

This high idealism and faith in the Vedas are, in fact, also a cover for a very personal motive. Having chosen the life of pleasure (*kāma*, *preyas*), outside the framework of righteous conduct (*dharma*)—there is no higher mode of righteousness for the Brahman wife than conjugal fidelity, for then she becomes a *pativratā* ('sworn to her husband'), spiritually mightier than even the goddesses—Alankaram had obviously felt driven by her conscience to choose a way to atone for her sin: she had decided to make Appu a Vedic scholar. As she confesses to him when he prepares to return to the village on hearing that the old woman who had provided him both home and school during the sixteen years of his Vedic studies is ill (Alankaram is afraid Appu will not come back to her):

You are someone very special to me, Appu. It is by my concern for you that I must atone for everything. You are my last son. [She repudiates the three illegitimate children.] I tortured myself thinking how I could find atonement. Violent suicide could only mean my death and the end of me. Finally I decided to put you into the *pathshala* [traditional Brahmanical school]. Those who learn the Vedas become *rishis* [singers of sacred hymns, sages]. They are ageless and pure as fire. I hoped you would return like that and I could fall at your feet . . . (p. 123).

Alankaram had hoped to atone for her moral lapse by ensuring the moral perfection of her son and then serving him and thus become herself purified. She made her choices selfishly and, therefore, they were not wise: neither when she preferred Shivasu over Dandapani nor when she preferred Appu over her other children. Not that a parent in upper-caste Hindu society would be blamed for dedicating one of the sons to the study of the Vedas; but her choice of the life of a Vedic scholar for her son had been tainted by her primary concern with her own atonement. A son is by definition the saviour, *putra*, one who delivers his parents and ancestors from the tortures of

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hell.[5] This obligation is an absolute value: the essence of sonship is filial piety. But when an errant mother (or father) looks upon the son as the instrument of her (or his) salvation, the relationship becomes perverted and the parental purpose defeated.

Appu does indeed decide to stay on in the village. He is repelled by a morally amorphous city—'I don't like anything about Madras' (p. 147)—and from a home where he has suffered the most grievous emotional trauma that a son may have to experience—the painful discovery that both his mother and father must be judged by him to be morally infirm. Alankaram's arrogance and Dandapani's cowardice weigh the same ultimately in the scale of moral values. On his return from the village school after a sixteen-year absence, Appu's discovery of Alankaram's truth made him see her in a new light. 'Why could she not be ordinary, like other people's mothers? Why did she have this imperious bearing and form, this arrogance on her face? . . .' (p. 109). As for Dandapani, 'Why did he not leave the house and become a sanyasi? Why was he still eating the food she cooked and served, indifferent to disgrace?' (p. 114). Appu had indeed wanted to tell his father: 'I feel like crying when I look at you. Do you call yourself a man? . . . I feel you ought to be driven away from home' (p. 117). In putting up with a wife who was unfaithful to him, Dandapani was unfaithful to his own truly begotten children.

Realizing that Appu would not come home, Alankaram visits him in the village, only to have her fears confirmed; he is not going back, for there is no 'home' to go back to—just a house. The home is a moral place marked by conjugal fidelity and filial piety. She must now make her *final* choice, which she does, firmly as before, but this time wisely. She tells Appu she is going north, far from Madras, to the sacred city of Kashi, to await her death there.

[5] *Naraka*, hell, is a place for the torture of sinners and for those whose post-mortuary rites have not been performed properly. There are a number of *narakas*, and *put* is one of them. The deliverance of those consigned to hell for want of post-mortuary rites, and prevention of one's manes (*pitṛ*) being so condemned, is achieved through oblations, particularly the biannual food offerings called *śrāddha*. The person who makes these food offerings is *ideally* one's natural son, but there are others who are also eligible to do so.

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It is sound sense [she says]. A woman must die in front of her son—or in Kashi. I thought of you as my only son [she actually had three] and I thought you had become a *rishi* and at your feet I hoped to burn my soul; my all. But you have become a mother's son [the reference is to the benefactress of the village Vedic school]. . . . I am going to Kashi and live there. . . . There is no other way. Many old women go to Kashi to die. I, too, shall go there and wait. (p. 165)

It may be pointed out here that, in conformity with traditional Hindu belief, Alankaram might have expressed the wish to die at the feet of her husband, but she treats him as if he were dead by proposing to act as Hindu widows do. She has wronged him but she will not seek his forgiveness. The novelist clearly suggests that she is a culturally abnormal person. Only widows go to die in Kashi: it is a common belief that a widow must have been guilty of some moral lapse and her widowhood is punishment for that. Dying in Kashi not only absolves one of all sins but—and this is so much more significant from the Hindu point of view—also ensures *mokṣa*, liberation from rebirth through union with the Absolute. This becomes possible as God grants knowledge to the devotee at the very moment of his or her death in Kashi, destroying the fruits of all past actions—good and bad (see Parry 1981).

So Alankaram goes to Kashi: her pursuit of *kāma* (eros) entails for her the pursuit of *kāla* (thanatos). Or shall we say that she goes there to begin a new life, as an autonomous moral agent, cutting off all her worldly attachments, including the bond with her favourite son? It might be argued here that without worldly attachments there is nothing to be moral about, but the novelist seems more interested in highlighting yet another and more general strand in Hindu thought. Alankaram will now be her own saviour by her act of renunciation and through divine grace. When taking leave of the school benefactress (who had called Appu back to the village), Alankaram had sought her blessing so that she might gain 'knowledge and enlightenment'. The old lady had assured her: 'God will give everything. If one abandons oneself to Him, there is nothing he will not give' (p. 164).

Turning now to Appu, we find that he had met and known two women at the village Vedic school—its benefactress, Bha-

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vaniammal, and her brother's daughter, Indu, who is a few months younger than Appu. Finding herself a childless widow at thirty, but in possession of an estate in land, Bhavaniammal had endowed most of it to establish the school. She had brought her brother there to teach and Indu was his daughter. His wife and he had died within a couple of years of each other, leaving the little Indu an orphan. Bhavaniammal arranged Indu's marriage, but her husband also died three years later. Appu had arrived at the school before Indu's marriage and Bhavaniammal had thus been a foster mother to both the boy and the girl.

While Appu is grappling with the painful situation in his home, after having returned there on the completion of his studies—in acknowledgement of his familial obligation about which his father had kept reminding him—Bhavaniammal suffers a paralytic stroke. Informed about it, Appu rushes back to the village. Though Bhavaniammal is out of danger by the time he gets there, she is not sure of the future. Besides, the old teacher in the school, who had taken her brother's place, is also not well. Bhavaniammal had, in fact, asked Appu to stay on to teach when he finished his studies, but he declined, even though the village school had been like a home to him. She now repeats her invitation and Appu accepts, disillusioned as he is with his own home and parents.

Bhavaniammal is a very humane and practical woman. Her 'mind is like the Kaveri [which flows beside the village]. It rolls along broad and majestic, with affection and compassion in its swell' (p. 153). She gets the land deed altered to ensure that Appu and Indu will be provided for, even if no more pupils come to learn the Vedas. She is afraid that many villagers will be jealous of Appu and that the orthodox among them will not approve of Appu living under the same roof as the young widow; Bhavaniammal surely knows that Indu and Appu have always been in love with each other. And yet she alters her will in their favour because, as she says, her affection for the two of them is greater than her reverence for the Vedas —a very bold confession for a Brahman woman to make. She recalls that she had endowed the school thirty years earlier to enable some people to learn the Vedas—and one hundred and four pupils had done so already.

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[But] why count the heads? Is that not mere pride? The Vedas will survive even without us. They are eternal. . . . If you [Appu] can, continue to teach the Vedas. And if you cannot, give food and shelter to a few boys, then send them to some Tamil or English school. Let them have a free choice. What does it matter whether one learns the Vedas or something else? A few boys who are destitute must be fed. But it is necessary to be aware of god and he is there in the shape of hunger. If you remember that for my sake, it shall be sufficient (pp. 148–9).

Bhavaniammal's view of the world is a balanced one, neither thoughtlessly conventional nor sentimental. Her primary concern appears to be the good of others—be they Indu, Appu, or the village children. She is Appu's second mother, as it were, and Alankaram realizes this when she visits the village in the hope of claiming back her son, and learns of what Bhavaniammal has done. Alankaram's love for Appu and the choice she made on his behalf were rooted in concern for herself—her pursuit of pleasure and the wish to atone for her sins both stemmed from this preoccupation. There is, however, sarcasm as well as sorrow in Alankaram's speech when she tells Appu that he has become 'a mother's son' instead of a sage and seer (*ṛṣi*). The reference is to his supposed fall, for she implies that he has been ensnared by Bhavaniammal's will. Alankaram had hoped that he would be free of worldly entanglements—that, himself redeemed by the Vedas, he would deliver others from sin and the bitter fruits of sin.

It seems to me that in this story Bhavaniammal alone emerges unsullied by any self-centred involvement with mundane affairs. She lives for others and uses her worldly possessions for their good and happiness. She cares for them for their own sake; she loves Appu for his own sake first and only then for the sake of the Vedas. She is the mother who gives and does not demand; she makes her choices wisely and is a *true* mother. Though a widow, she by no means betokens inauspiciousness. Like women-*bhakta* (devotees of god), she has cast away her human husband to devote herself to god's creatures and traversed half the way to divinity. The contrast with the casting away of Dandapani by Alankaram is striking, in both its manner and significance.

Human mothers may be foolish or wise but motherhood re-

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mains a supreme value in Hindu thought. In the myths and symbols of Hindu civilization, bountiful, nourishing motherhood is represented by rivers; in Janakiraman's novel it is represented by the Kaveri.[6] In fact, when Appu tells Indu that Bhavaniammal is affectionate and compassionate, he compares her to the Kaveri's broad and majestic roll. Significantly, the reader is introduced to the Kaveri even before he is introduced to Appu or anybody else in the opening paragraph of the novel, which speaks of his having become possessed by the river during his sixteen years in the village on its banks.

Appu had been frightened by his first encounter with the Kaveri the morning after his arrival in the village, when his father took him to its banks for a bath. The river was in flood, turbulent, rolling by like 'some great sighing snake' (p. 6). On that very first encounter he had also had a sight of the bounty of the river: a kingfisher plunging for its prey and emerging with something in its beak. Ever afterwards, Appu had found a mother in the Kaveri in whom he could confide—to whom 'he could speak his heart' (p. 150), and then listen. While his Vedic teacher taught him to sing the hymns and recite the texts loud and clear, perhaps bending his ear to detect and correct any mispronunciation, the Kaveri taught him to listen and speak in silence: and it spoke to him of the same truth as the Vedas—of the Eternal and the Absolute. When Bhavaniammal tells Appu that she has altered her will and what she envisages the future might be like, he makes

> his way to the Kaveri—whatever emotion moved him it was always, and only, to the river that he could speak his heart. . . . He remembered the evening he had come here just after finishing his studies, shortly before leaving for home. Today he felt just as he had that day—a sense of seeing the river anew and a strong reluctance to go away from it (pp. 150–1).

There is a kind of mysterious primary bond of attachment

[6] After I had written this essay, I came across the following observation about the villagers of Kumbapettai in the Thanjavur district of Tamilnadu: 'The river Kaveri and its irrigation channels were thought of as the villagers' mother. The muddy water in mid-July was her menstruation, the flood tide in early August her pregnancy, and the harvest her children' (Gough 1981: 170; also see ibid.: 225–6). A. K. Ramanujan tells me that T. Janakiraman wrote a book on the Kaveri.

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between Appu and the Kaveri—like that of a child to its mother, rooted in the depths of his being, but finding in culture the tongue with which to express it. It is noteworthy that not only do we take leave of Appu in the village on the bank of the Kaveri—the Ganga of the South, so called—we also remember that Alankaram is on her way to Kashi to live and die on the bank of the Ganga itself—the holiest of India's rivers. According to Hindu tradition, these holy rivers of India wash away not only human sins but also the imperfections of being and understanding that necessitate the making of choices.[7] Though an elemental part of nature, the river here emerges as a key symbol for culture, while Alankaram, by an interesting reversal, symbolizes nature in the form of rampant human appetites. Bhavaniammal bridges nature and culture and points to the human potential for moral perfection. Though human like Alankaram, she is more like the Kaveri in her bounteousness.

Appu remains unfree—or so it seems to me—as his choices are made for him by others, though he does not abide by all of them. Alankaram's choice makes him a Vedic scholar, but he alone could have made himself a *ṛṣi*. His father's exhortations bring him home from the village—a father who, he comes to believe in the end, should himself have been driven away from home—but he alone could have chosen to become a householder (*gṛhastha*). Bhavaniammal recalls him to the village, involving him in an act of renunciation, but he alone may will it. He resists Indu's love, believing that he is expected by his culture and society to treat another man's wife or widow as his mother or sister, but this moral position also he finds difficult to sustain. He has to confess to himself that he has always been in love with Indu without having had the courage to admit it. In fact, he had rebuked Indu for declaring her love for him and beseeching him not to go away on the eve of his departure from the village, on completion of his studies. He had told her that her face reminded him of his mother's,

[7] The rich symbolism of the redeeming rivers (and rain) is familiar to students of Hindu ritual, mythology, art and architecture. It has also found its way into contemporary fiction. A notable example is Herman Hesse's fine novel *Siddhartha*, which is not only about India but, more significantly, about 'the quest and yearning of nature for new forms and new possibilities'.

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that he hoped to go back to his mother 'clean in body and clean in mind'—an adept in the Vedas—without 'smearing' himself with the 'mud' of an illegitimate erotic relationship. 'When you return after a bath in the holy Kaveri you shouldn't drop into a roadside tavern' (p. 42). His final, pathetic appeal to her had been: 'Send me home safe'. And home he went as a dutiful son, only to discover the bitter truth about his mother and father, which turns him into a mildly rebellious son.

Finally, on his return to the village, having yielded to Bhavaniammal's persuasion to stay on, Appu meekly accepts Indu's invitation to share his burdens with her—which is itself not a clear choice, only an acquiescence: 'if ever anything bothers you, tell it to me whatever it is. You can't bear it alone . . .' (p. 143). What could the sharing of burdens between them mean, for Brahman widows do not remarry? In this sense, though the novel ends, the moral discourse contained in it does not come to a satisfactory conclusion. Appu's moral dilemmas—arising out of his relations with the three women in his life—remain unresolved. In opting to live in the village with Indu, does he really surrender to Alankaram? Does his decision never to marry, conveyed to Alankaram during her fateful visit to the village, constitute a vow of celibacy? If so, will he have the moral courage to adhere to it in the presence of Indu's searing passion for him? Already, before the story is brought to its end, Appu seems to have overcome his earlier resistance to being even touched by Indu. When she first declared her love for him, he had sought to silence her by pronouncing physical love between them as sinful. Her retort had been: 'It doesn't seem to me. What is a sin? To do and say things against one's conscience' (p. 40). Appu had no answer to that; obviously Indu's view of moral conduct is different from everybody else's in the novel.

Indu appears to be the only character who repudiates cultural norms, not guiltily as Alankaram does, but innocently and even self-confidently. She appeals to a higher morality than that of culture—the morality of conscience. But this remains regrettably vague in the novel. I would not disagree with the novelist if he wants to suggest that honesty with one's own self (authenticity) is the cornerstone of morality; but there appears to be a crucial difference between the honesty of Bhava-

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niammal and Indu. While the former judges what she feels in terms of the good of others, even if it is unconventional, the latter's stand seems to point to the idealization of the intensity of feeling—and this could turn out to be a perilous path, thin and sharp as the proverbial razor's edge.[8]

Appu perhaps never listened carefully enough to the Kaveri, which would have liberated him, but only to the human mothers who bind him to the wheel of *karma*. Bhavaniammal, the 'good' mother, does this no less than Alankaram, the 'bad' mother. In fact, the former binds him fast to this world in a three-stranded bond of attachment (like the three-stranded holy neck cord symbolizing a Brahman's worldly obligations) consisting of the land, the school, and Indu. The flowing river would have spoken to Appu of the Brahmanical quest for the dissolution of worldly attachments and obligations and the supreme value of transcendence in the context of moral choices. The ideal is to overcome the agony of making choices by attaining a level of self-awareness which enables one to act morally as a matter of course—spontaneously.

To conclude: human beings live in socially constructed worlds, and everywhere the *nomos* is legitimated in terms of, among other values, certain moral imperatives. The social order thus becomes a cosmo-moral order. This fact does not, however, render it immune to the unsettling impact of human choices which question, seek to alter, or even repudiate its moral foundations. Not to speak of other social relationships, even the universally acknowledged 'axiomatic amity' (Fortes 1969) of the mother–son relationship may turn out to be fragile, as it indeed does in the case of Alankaram and Appu. Though one does not choose one's parents or, in traditional Brahman communities, one's spouse,[9] a person may still be faced with situations involving choice between alternative modes of relating

[8] The clash of *dharmas* and the opposition of culture and conscience is a perennial theme of Hindu culture. One of its most celebrated expressions is in the constant self-questioning of Yudhishthira, the very embodiment of *dharma* in the Mahabharata. In our own times, Gandhi's life is a similar notable example.

[9] I do not have in mind only the prescriptive marriage (with a cousin) in south India, but also the widespread practice of parent-arranged marriage in Hindu society.

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to them. If these choices are not made wisely, they result in suffering.

The Sins of Appu's Mother may be read as a discourse on the making of moral choices and the suffering or contentment (if not fulfilment) that they bring to the moral agent. This may be highlighted by recapitulating the choices that the major characters in the novel make, their individual experience of suffering, and the manner in which they cope with it.

Shivasu is a shadowy figure and, from the little one is able to gather about him, he could well be the typical amoral person for whom the distinction between good and bad choices is meaningless. His sole concern is with the pursuit of pleasure, unmindful of any norms, so that the 'desired' (*preyas*) is judged to be good in itself without reference to a higher and encompassing notion of the 'good' (*sreyas*). Dandapani, in contrast, is a weak character who suffers, one presumes, from his wife's rejection of him as husband and mentor, from her fall from the ideal of chastity, as also, perhaps, from his own helplessness. 'One must not try too hard to understand. Keep quiet, just looking on [he tells Appu]. That's what God has created us for' (p. 118). He obviously keeps his suffering to himself, and finds consolation in the many mundane chores of his daily life. He may be mistaken for a renouncer but he seems to be only a compromiser who settles for life in a shrunken moral space.[10]

Both Shivasu and Dandapani are dominated by Alankaram. One gets the impression that she could have rejected Shivasu, just as she had discarded Dandapani, but that she chooses not to do so till the very end. When she calls Shivasu 'the serpent that circled my feet' (p. 124) in her last conversation with Appu before he finally leaves home, she basically covers up or mistakes her own pleasure-seeking self for her lover. Alankaram is an abnormally demanding person and the choices she makes bring suffering to her and to others, and lead her almost inevitably to seek a tryst with death—a choice beyond which there are no more choices to make in this life. Her suffering arises from a sense of moral rectitude, however. Unlike Shivasu, she seems to be aware of the distinction between the 'desired'

[10] Uma Shankari (Janakiraman's daughter) holds that Dandapani's resignation is a form of renunciation and that he has in a sense come close to being a detached person. I do not quite see him in that light (personal communication).

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and the 'good': only her path to the latter ideal lies for her through repentance for an exclusive pursuit of the former. The story of her life and the choices that constitute it, including the final renunciation, reveal her to be a morally infirm person trapped in dualities. It is obvious that at each critical step in her life she could have made other choices, bringing the pursuit of *preyas* under the control of *śreyas* and done so altruistically rather than egoistically. She would then have awaited death, one presumes, with a sense of contentment—a cherished Hindu ideal[11]—and not in sorrow and repentance.

Appu is his mother's son in so far as he too is trapped in dualities—in the conflict between the 'desired' and the 'good' —though he appears to be firmer in his affirmation of the primacy of *śreyas* over *preyas*. It is in terms of this guiding principle of his life that he seeks to regulate his relations with his parents, Bhavaniammal and Indu. The eternal verities of human existence are symbolized for him by the Vedas, just as they are for his father and mother, but it seems that he would like to *live* by them while Dandapani and Alankaram only *use* them in their different ways. Appu's suffering arises not from a sense of sin (like Alankaram's) or failure (like Dandapani's) but from the moral effort required in subordinating nature to culture. Since he regards righteous conduct as binding on all, his parents' failure is his own failure too, and he suffers deeply for this reason too. There are, from this perspective, no individuals, no moral agents as such, but only relations which constitute the moral space.

The suffering which is the lot of Indu is of a different nature. She suffers from what seems to her to be the tyranny of *dharma*. She is married at a young age without her wishes being ascertained, for that is how Brahman girls get their husbands. She becomes a widow within three years and is expected to bear all the blame and burdens that widows do among Brahmans. If she does not bear the tell-tale mark of widowhood on her person—the shaven head—it is because her young husband specially made this request to Bhavaniammal when he had lost hope that he would live. Indu suffers for all this and more. She appeals to a higher *dharma*, that of 'conscience'. She seems to question the social or external basis of the moral life and

[11] See Chapter 5.

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stresses 'sincerity' as the first moral principle. It is her sorrow that Appu does not understand her: they do not speak the same moral idiom. Her assertion that honesty such as hers (in acknowledging her love for Appu) is better than the deception Alankaram practises, and the 'external' adherence to morality which he himself seems to practise, leaves Appu speechless. His silence is not a heartless and mindless indifference, but born of sincere bewilderment—and this is the root of his suffering.

The moral struggles and agonies that are the stuff of life for Dandapani, Alankaram, Appu and Indu appear to have been overcome in Bhavaniammal's life. Not that she may not have suffered like the others; but, by the time we encounter her in the novel, she is sure of herself and has risen above such considerations as what other people may say about one's actions, such misfortunes as widowhood, and such virtues as a superficial reverence for the Vedas. Not for her the conflict between the 'desired' and the 'good', but her life is the very antithesis of Shivasu's, for she has endeavoured to absorb *preyas* into *śreyas*. Again, not for her the conflict between the culture and conscience—but then she is unlike both Indu and Alankaram. She is not like them because she seeks nothing for herself.

Bhavaniammal points to the possibility of attaining transcendence in human life through right choices, till a stage is reached when one is no longer in need of having to choose. Through her own life—by being what she is—she redeems others. She is the life-nurturing mother. While the nature of Alankaram's suffering 'provides the means by which death may be introduced or justified' (O'Flaherty 1976: 212), Bhavaniammal's sorrows, in contrast, have cleansed her own life and bestowed on her the capacity to bring peace and meaning into the lives of others. Her suffering may be said to have ripened her life to the point where it flowers into love and understanding. She has come as close to becoming like the Kaveri as any human being might. And this, indeed, is the human ideal—to reach beyond self and suffering, and to merge *preyas* and *śreyas* in a single vision of life.

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5

LIVING AND DYING

Tell us that about which they doubt, O Death,
What there is in the great passing-on . . .

KATHA UPANISHAD

Alike for me is life and death:
Happy to live and happy to die,
I mourn for none, none mourns for me.

LAL DED

INTRODUCTORY

The attitudes of a people to death and dying should be viewed, it seems to me, in their totality, bringing out the inter-connectedness of belief, emotion and behaviour. This is not, however, what has been done generally by social anthropologists and sociologists writing on Hindu society. Beginning with Srinivas's classic study of the Coorgs (1952), through such detailed ethnographies of Indian villages as Berreman's (1963), down to such relatively recent monographs as those by Inden and Nicholas (1977) and Parry (1979), we have been provided more or less detailed analytical descriptions of mortuary rites and death pollution. But there has been very little (if any) discussion of the Hindu cognitive orientation to death. In this respect the 'field view' of death and dying seems to have turned out to be narrower than the 'book view'.[1] In fact, some recent innovative discussions of the theme have come from scholars whose work is based on textual analysis (see, for example, Malamoud 1975 and Das 1982). Parry (1982) is perhaps the first social anthropologist to have directed his inquiries in the

[1] Reflecting on the relative neglect of the study of death in its various aspects by sociologists specializing on Hindu society, it is amusing to recall what Rivers wrote well over half a century ago to one of his correspondents who was then working on a book on Kenyan tribes: 'Death is usually sufficiently important and rich in material to have a chapter to itself' (quoted in Langham 1981: 302).

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field to this cognitive orientation, and he has obviously taken the texts seriously.

One way the sociologist might try to capture death as a 'total fact', which it is in the subjective experience of the bereaved, would be through the conceptualization of its cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects in terms of the notion of hierarchy. So viewed, the cognitive level (rather than aspect) is concerned with the significance of death in an encompassing cosmo-moral scheme of life. The behavioural level incorporates all the practical consequences of death, including the performance of rituals, formal mourning, affirmation or termination of social ties, division and inheritance of property, and so on. Finally, the affective level refers to the emotional impact of death on individuals, the personal grief and sorrow that they feel as a result of their bereavement. I would like to suggest that we will be able to provide much richer interpretations of behavioural and emotional responses to death—bringing out the structures of meaning and significance—if we consider first the cognitive orientations of the people concerned.

Such a holistic view places in proper perspective Hertz's profound observation that, since the 'physical individual' appears in society as a 'social being', his 'destruction' or death is a 'sacrilege' against society (Hertz 1960: 77). Taken by itself this observation and others in the same vein—for example, 'death . . . posits the most terrifying threat to the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 119)—may result in an overweening accent on the social significance of death at the cost of the personal or the subjective import. Our effort should be to connect them—the collective and personal perspectives—and consequently to make sense of living and dying as a single phenomenon or an integrated experience. Malinowski was quite right when he observed that 'he who is faced by death turns to the promise of life' (1948: 47) and this, needless to emphasize, is ultimately possible only cognitively.[2]

Having affirmed the importance of the cognitive level within

[2] According to Hindu tradition the rituals described in the *brāhmaṇa* texts had for their principal aim the extension of life and the overcoming of death. The promise of physical immortality held out in these texts has given way to the philosophical attitude of the Upanishads which emphasize overcoming death through

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a holistic perspective on death, I would now like to focus on it as I have been able to understand it in the course of my studies of Kashmiri Pandit culture and society.[3] There are a number of studies dealing with the behavioural entailments following immediately after death, based on texts (for example, Pandey 1969) or observation (for example, Stevenson 1920), which are broadly true of the Pandits also. I will mention very briefly some post-mortuary rituals, since these bear upon my main argument. Any merit that the discussion might have would lie in providing a perspective for the study of the literature on rituals connected with death and the manes, inheritance rules, post-mortem social rearrangements, etc. Unfortunately, the study of bereavement in Hindu society from the point of view of subjective experience remains a relatively neglected area, but the data and analysis presented here also bear upon that aspect of death.

TYPES OF DEATH AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Death in a Kashmiri village is naturally not an everyday occurrence, but its possibility is ever present and so is the concern with it. Moreover, its familiarity does not make it trivial. It is considered essentially a family event, though not all members of the family, or the narrower domestic group within it, are equally affected by it, whether emotionally, ritually or materially. Thus the death of an infant, or even a newly born baby, causes some emotional hurt to the mother, and perhaps the father, but hardly affects anybody else. This is understandable since the involvement of a growing child in social life is a gradual process, duly marked by the kind of 'rites of passage' van Gennep (1960) wrote about. By contrast, the death of a man in the prime of his youth is judged as being calamitous and has considerable ritual and material implications, not to speak of the emotional traumas it entails.

One often hears 'the Pandits exclaim '*marunai chu!*' (ah,

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the termination of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The 'promise of life' is thus of more than one kind.

[3] See Madan 1965 and Chapter 1 above. I may add that there are many other points in this chapter which tie up with the discussion in Chapter 1 and it would involve too many cross-references to indicate all of them.

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one has to die!) in the course of everyday conversation. I would like to suggest that this utterance does not so much refer to a fear of finitude, or accountability, which some philosophies of death dwell upon,[4] as to a concern with rectitude or morality in the conduct of everyday life. In the course of my discussions with the Pandits, I have often raised the question as to how one might know for sure that a particular person is morally upright, that he or she has led and continues to lead a 'good' life. Needless to emphasize, the word 'good' is not used here in any narrow sense of prudence or pragmatism but refers to moral imperatives as defined in Pandit culture. Not that worldly success is disdained: on the contrary, it is often argued by the Pandits that, if a man has done well by himself in a material or worldly sense—if he has health, wealth, sons and fame—then he has led a 'blessed' life, but that outward signs of this kind are not a true indication of his *indeed* having led a good life. The apparent success and good fortune that attends one in this, the present life (*ihaloka*) could well be the rich and deserved harvest of good actions (*karma*) in previous lives. Even while enjoying such good fortune, however, one may be sowing through bad deeds the seeds of suffering and sorrow for one's next life (*paraloka*).

Given such a moral calculus, how else does one know for certain that a person is leading a good life? The Pandits aver that there are some simple though not certain answers to this significant and complex question, besides the one mentioned above, namely, in terms of apparent worldly success. Thus, it is suggested that we should examine what a man is actually doing in his relations with other human beings and explore the spirit that motivates him. Does he look after his dependents well, particularly helpless widows and aged parents? Does he engage in prescribed ritual performances? Is he of a righteous (*dhārmika*) frame of mind? A person may be seen to be doing what is right and good, devoting himself and his material resources—body (*tana*) and wealth (*dhana*)—to leading a good life, but how do we know for certain that he is involved in doing so

[4] Kashmiri Muslims also use this expression ('one has to die!'), but in their case the notion of final reckoning on the day of judgement is present. The Pandits of course repudiate any such notion of final accountability, though not of retribution.

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spiritually, applying his mind or spirit (*mana*) to it? There can be no spiritual involvement without sincerity. As the Pandits put it, the good life must not be merely led outwardly but, first of all, inwardly, 'by the truthful heart' (*pazidila*). But a person's sincerity—the inward condition—is difficult to fathom.

Is there, then, no way in which one can vouch for a person having led a good life? The Pandits maintain that the ultimate and critical sign of the good life may be available in the manner a person attains his death. I use the word 'attain' to emphasize that the ideal is to strive to die in a manner which underscores the active role of a person in his own death, as contrasted with the passivity conveyed by expressions like 'passing away' or 'dying'; even the phrase 'meet one's death' does not appear to be adequate. The point is not that the Pandits do not use words and expressions signifying simply the 'passing away' or 'passing beyond this life', for they do so, but that they emphasize the possibility of attaining a good death through letting go of, or renouncing, the life-breath (*prāṇatyāga*) voluntarily, in full command: as the Isha Upanishad says, may the life-breath enter into the immortal breath (17). It is, then, the good death that bears true witness to the good life.

The main elements of the notion of good death are the place (*sthāna*), the time (*kāla*), and the physical state of the person (*pātra*) at the time of his death. The best place to die in, according to the Pandits, is one's own home, the house in which one has lived. For most men this would also be the house where one was born,[5] but in the case of women it would be the house where one has lived after marriage and borne children. The house is not a mere dwelling but the microcosm of the universe (as discussed in Chapter 1 above). It is in the house that the householder (*gṛhastha*) pursues his legitimate worldly goals

[5] Pandit houses are made of fired brick, timber and mud-plaster or lime mortar. There are several houses in the villages I have visited which are more than a hundred years old. Every house is expected to last well beyond the life-span of its builders and the succeeding two generations. It is not surprising that people should develop a deep attachment to their homes. The idea that it is better to die away from home on the banks of a river, entertained by many Brahman communities, is not favoured by the Pandits, though they know about it as they do about the Rajput ideal of death on the battlefield.

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(*dharma-karma*), and seeks to improve the moral quality of his person or self. It is, therefore, right and proper that he should die here. I will have more to say on this later.

The only preferred alternative is to die in a holy place such as Hardwar or Kashi. This is, however, seen as an appropriate end to the life of an unattached person—one who has no immediate kin or one who has overcome worldly attachments—rather than that of a householder. Some elderly Pandits (mostly men) do go to holy places during the winter, but this is seen more as a purificatory ritual—the washing-off of one's evil or sins—in preparation for the good death rather than the wish or hope to die at such a place.

So, one should die at home, but that is not enough to constitute a good death. One must die, besides, at an astrologically appropriate time, which would ensure a smooth transition from this world of human beings (*ihaloka*) to the worlds beyond, namely: the world of the death-god (*yamaloka*), where disembodied souls (*preta*) go after cremation until they attain the status of manes (*pitṛ*); the world of manes (*pitṛloka*); and, finally, back to this world or, best of all, to the world of gods (*svarga*), where one attains eternal bliss (*ānanda*) through the merger of the individual soul with the *Brahman* of which it is an emanation.[6]

Finally, there is the personal condition of the dying person: has he or she lived a long life marked by the fulfilment of legitimate worldly goals (*puruṣārtha*) of wealth, progeny (particularly sons), and fame among fellow human beings, as also by the pursuit of righteous conduct (*dharma*), the performance of rituals (*kriyā-karma*), and devotion (*bhakti*) to one's chosen deity (*iṣṭadeva* or *iṣṭadevī*)? Has death been attained peacefully and swiftly, in full command of one's physical and mental faculties? Do one's survivors include only those younger than

[6] There are two opinions prevalent among the Pandits regarding the precise nature of *svarga* (heaven) and *naraka* (hell). According to the one, these are places to which the disembodied person is taken after death and he spends as much time in each as is required by the calculus of retribution. Only thereafter is he reborn. According to the second, *svarga* and *naraka* are states of existence in this human world and the joys of the former and the tortures of the latter are experienced here itself. A disembodied person is reincarnated immediately after he makes the transition from the category of ghost to that of ancestor.

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oneself, and, in the case of a woman, her husband, and are they well provided for?[7] More such elements in the personal condition of the dying person could be listed, but the most crucial of them all, I may repeat, is that one should die in full consciousness of the event, with one's mind fixed upon the Supreme God (*Bhagavān*) or the Divine Spirit (*Brahman*). Thus alone may one be sure that, even if one does not attain release (*mukti*) from reincarnation (*saṁsāra*), at least the next life will be better than that coming to its end. A person who departs thus, having fulfilled obligations, enjoyed the joys of the householder's life (*gārhasthya*), and 'chosen' the exact moment of his death, is said to have attained the 'good way of going' (*gat prāvin*; cf. the Sanskrit *sadgati* or *paramagati*, 'going the good or great way', and hence the Upanishadic poser quoted in the epigraph).

How many Pandits do, in fact, attain the good death as defined above? The answer to this question will have to be: very few. Quite understandably, therefore, the survivors always try to make claims, within the limits imposed by the actual circumstances of the death which has occurred, that some of the signs of the good death had, in fact, been present but that they had been unwise or blinded by excessive emotional attachment to the dying person not to take the cue and had, therefore, failed to understand what was being communicated to them. Some deaths—particularly of one's parents—are sought to be made into 'myths', not so much in some kind of perverse mendacity as in hopeful reaffirmation of some cardinal principles of the good life and in stressing that death, though painful, is not bad as such but that only a particular way of dying—denoting loss of self-control in life and in death—is so. In other words, what is said is true in the sense in which all myths are true, though it may not be a strictly factual description of the actual event. When the signs and indications that one looks for on such an occasion are more discernible than is common, grief and mourning among the survivors are mixed with thanksgiving. They may vie with one another in describing the last moments of the life of the departed person to visitors, kith and kin, who come to condole with them.

Good deaths, and the last words spoken by those who attain

[7] The Pandits say that the father who bequeaths debts to his sons is, in fact, a foe and not a friend: *ṛṇa kṛtā pitā śatruḥ*.

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it, are remembered and talked about for edification for years. They constitute Pandit society's commentary on human life. Narayan Das died when he was more than ninety years old and was survived by sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He had done well by himself as a businessman, acquired much property and built a big house. One of his sons was running successfully the business started by him, while another had acquired great fame in the Pandit community for his learning in Shaiva philosophy and for his saintly life. The old man's funeral was a celebration, complete with music, and the post-cremation community meals were indeed feasts.

Similarly, when Gangamal died, her aged husband escorted the dead body to the cremation ground. Her son, who was then in his mid-forties and held an important position as a civil servant, used to recall, years after her death, that many Pandit women had come out of their homes to pay obeisance to the dead body on its way to the cremation ground, exclaiming that they too hoped to die the same splendid way, that is, survived by an aged husband and a worthy son. Such a death becomes an auspicious event.

Now, this Pandit, an only son of his parents, had been deeply attached to his mother, and she had died a rather painful death. As the last moments of her life lingered on, the assembled kin and relatives had asked him to hold her feet in a gesture of pleading and ask her to give up her grip on life. The point about such advice is that the mother was believed to be clinging to life because she knew how grieved her son would be by her passing away. She had finally died with her son holding her feet and after he had expressed the wish for the end of the agony of her mortal frame.[8] In this case, a lingering and painful death was not interpreted to mean that the old lady had not led a good life: the blame was placed upon the excessive attachment of her son to her and only partly on her love for him. In any case, the mother–son bond is the very model for

[8] This seems to be a widely prevalent notion among Hindus. Thus, we read about the saint-mystic Ramakrishna, who, when suffering from painful throat cancer, whispered, '. . . I've gone on suffering like this because I am afraid you'll shed so many tears if I leave you. But if you will tell me, "That is enough suffering—let the body go", then I may give it up' (Isherwood 1965: 298).

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virtuous human attachment. On his part, the son used to talk years later, till he himself died, of the special signs accompanying his mother's death to expound on her virtuous life.

A community which entertains a notion of the good death may be expected to complement it with a notion of the bad death. All the conditions and signs mentioned above are reversed to construct the paradigm of such a death. Thus, I was told of a priest who had died a bad death, after a protracted illness and there were no close kinsfolk to look after him. His wife had died before him and none of the sons born to them had survived into adulthood. His only surviving child was a daughter who, being married, was living with her own husband and children and, therefore, unable to attend on him on a full-time basis. His lingering death in rather sordid surroundings was attributed by some informants to the stealthy involvement of the deceased in *pretakriyā*, that is, the rituals of invoking ghosts to assist in human affairs, for good or for bad. He was a priest-sorcerer. It was recalled that when he walked about after nightfall dogs invariably barked at him.

A bad death is more often explained in terms of the burden of the bad *karma* of the previous birth. There was the case of an old man paralysed for three years, unable to move a leg and arm, unable to eat properly, speechless, but with an alert mind and eyes that could see and ears that could hear. Among those looking after him were a daughter, who had become a widow within days of her marriage at the age of sixteen, and a son who was a simpleton. To have such a daughter and also such a son living under one's roof is the worst misfortune that may befall a Pandit. The old man himself had been known to be a good man; the tortures he suffered as a father and his tragic last years were, therefore, seen by the people around him as the bitter fruit of bad *karma* in his previous life. A bad death certifies the existence of the cosmo-moral order just as the good death does. The question that may be raised at this point is whether death in certain circumstances points to moral chaos, the breakdown of the *nomos*.

Now, the Pandits do indeed entertain the notion of what may be called 'anomic' death, that is, death which raises misgivings, even if only temporarily, regarding the fragility of the moral

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foundations of human life. When these foundations seem to be vulnerable to death, then death does, indeed, appear as a terrifying 'onslaught of the nightmare' (Berger and Luckman 1967: 119). The death of an old couple's youthful son, married and with dependent children, is the prime example of what the Pandits call 'untimely or premature death', but this literal translation of the phrase *akāla mṛtyu* hardly captures the intensity of moral horror and personal sorrow which are sought to be conveyed when they use it. They also refer to such an event as *pralaya*, or the dissolution of the cosmo-moral order, for it upsets the natural–moral ordering of events—hence my characterization of it as anomic death. While the aged parent or parents lose the moral and perhaps the material mainstay of their old age, the young wife is stigmatized and even feared for the rest of her life and excluded from active participation in auspicious ceremonies. As for the children, orphans arouse as much sympathy in Pandit society as anywhere else. Ultimately such a death is also made bearable by invoking the notion of *karma:* even the unbearable is never *really* undeserved.

The notion of *pralaya* is also invoked sometimes to interpret collective deaths. However, such cases are rare, being confined to road accidents and very occasionally drowning and house-fires. Malefic spirits are sometimes held responsible for such occurrences, but more typically they are considered mysterious instances of the convergence of individual karmic trajectories, and, therefore, extremely inauspicious. In 1957, when I first arrived in the village of Utrassu-Umanagri for fieldwork, the villagers still had fairly fresh memories of what they had heard about the widespread killings of Pandits in the north-western parts of the Kashmir valley which had been raided by thousands of tribesmen from Pakistan ten years earlier. They had also heard or read about the communal riots in Panjab and Bengal in 1946–7. The older villagers remembered the Bihar and Quetta earthquakes of the mid-1930s. The consensus about these tragic events was, firstly, that the death of the victims had been ordained in this very manner—the notion of the convergence of individual karmic destinies in a collective catastrophe—and, secondly, that such events are indicative of a general decline of *dharma*: they are a foretaste, as it were, of

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the ultimate dissolution (*pralaya*) of the present degenerate age, the *kaliyuga*.

There is yet another kind of death recognized by the Pandits which should be mentioned here. In 1957 Tarachand Pandit was one of the older men (then in his mid-sixties) of Utrassu-Umanagri. He belonged to an 'aristocratic' family and was much respected for his knowledge of traditional sacred lore. He was well-versed in Sanskrit and also known for his upright personal life. When he died a couple of years later, I was informed of the event by letter by a couple of informants who regretted his passing away as it marked the end of the days of learned men endowed with traditional knowledge. I believe what these informants were trying to convey to me was that the old man had been an exemplar of the social–moral order and piety; therefore, his life had been exceptionally meaningful, inasmuch as it illumined the meaningfulness of life for members of his community: it offered them guidelines for action. His death grievously deprived the community of these guidelines, of the knowledge of moral precepts and rules for social action. It too was, I would like to suggest, a case of the threat of anomie of an exceptional kind. This fear of a decline into normlessness, or into a society whose norms might be strange or even abhorrent, was not felt by all the Pandits of the village, nor in the same measure by those who apprehended it. In any case (and as pointed out above) the Pandits always talk of the increasing moral degeneration of the *kaliyuga*. For those among them who seriously entertain the notion of moral degeneration from *satyayuga* (the age of truth) to *kaliyuga* (the age of ignorance and untruth), the death of Tarachand had a deep though not unexpected significance.

I should like to point out here that many deaths entail certain practical consequences and necessitate some social rearrangements, but it would be erroneous to consider them anomic for that reason. Let me illustrate by mentioning the cases of Somavati and Prabhavati, two widows of the village of Utrassu-Umanagri. In 1957 they were both in their early thirties. When they were widowed, each had an infant son. Though the terrible blow of widowhood abolishes all distinctions between one Pandit woman and another, it was apparent that with the passage of time the sympathy of the villagers had

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come to lie more with Prabhavati than Somavati. The latter belonged to a very prosperous land-owning household and everybody knew that she and her infant son had not suffered from want. She was the only adult literate woman of the village and was generally recognized as an intelligent person who had been able to manage her affairs quite well.

In contrast, Prabhavati belonged to a poor household with only a small land-holding. She was considered to be a simple woman, even simple-witted, and at the mercy of her deceased husband's elder brother (and his family) who was regarded as being a very selfish person. Many instances of his selfishness were cited and, in this context, the fact of his being a very prosperous person was underscored. Once, when I asked Prabhavati's son (then aged seventeen) what his feelings about his deceased father were, his reply was: 'Curse the fellow! I don't even have a memory of him.'

These two cases bring out how two deaths, which have the same ritual significance, and may be expected to have similar emotional significance, are yet very different in terms of the practical consequences they have: so much so, indeed, that even the emotional reactions acquire a hue other than what may be normally expected, as is evident from Prabhavati's son's total indifference to his deceased father. Normally, the Pandits readily resort to paeans when talking of their fathers as a matter of conventional morality, if not of personal sentiment.

The rearrangement of social relations that follows a death may also have variable significance. While widows may live on sufferance or may be looked after well (the latter is usual), widowers remarry if they can manage it (which is not always easy because of a shortage of women). Remarriage may create conflict along an expected though regrettable course of events. Ratanlal's mother died when he was about ten years old. His father, though in his late forties, married a young woman who soon bore him a daughter. The villagers maintained that Ratanlal's father was totally infatuated with his second wife who had no maternal feelings for the boy and contributed to the emergence of an emotional distance between father and son. The death of a mother is grievous enough, but the arrival of a stepmother, particularly if the paternal grandparents are dead, may amount to, in the words of an informant, 'an in-

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visible second death'—that is, as far as the child is concerned, for he loses not only his mother (by death) but also his father (by estrangement). In the normal course of events, the inauspiciousness of a death in the family is finally and best removed by the auspiciousness of marriage and childbirth,[9] but the practical consequences of a particular marriage may dictate a negative evaluation of it, as in the foregoing case.

While we are dealing with the consequences of widowers remarrying, it is pertinent to mention the Pandit attitude to a wife's death. Widowers suffer from none of the ritual or social disabilities that widows do. When a widower seeks to remarry (or his elders desire him to do so), the tallying of horoscopes, which is a prerequisite of any marriage and is undertaken by the girl's family, will be carried out with great care. A potential 'wife killer' (in the sense that his horoscope contains a *yoga*, or conjunction of astral bodies called *graha*, which will result in his wife's death) makes a good match for a potential 'husband killer'. On the whole, 'husband killers' are more feared than 'wife killers' and a man who has lost two wives may yet be able to marry a third time, though he may secretly pay a bride price (see Madan 1965: 118).

The point I want to stress here is that, apart from the very limited ritual and social consequences of widowerhood, a man is expected to keep his emotional feelings on the death of his wife entirely to himself and give no public expression to his grief. A man grieving openly over his wife's death only invites ridicule, not sympathy. There is the case of Damodar, whose wife died when he was in his sixties and both his sons were living with him in the same household along with their wives and children. For a Pandit in this kind of situation, the death of his wife is expected to be hardly an occasion for grieving. But Damodar did grieve, chiding his sons and daughters-in-law for being happy in their conjugal bliss, while his own wife had, as he put it, deserted him. The reaction of his children and all those who learnt about his behaviour was one of disbelief and ridicule.

While some deaths are regarded as having a manifold significance, others may be considered non-events or even welcomed. Still-births, or the death of a baby before it has cut teeth, are

[9] See Chapter 2 above.

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non-events in ritual and social terms. That the mother may suffer emotionally by such a death is another matter. As Hertz (1960) clearly pointed out, the death of a child may arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual, and go unnoticed since such collective responses are linked to the social status of the deceased. In these respects a child is indeed like a stranger. Moreover, the death of badly malformed babies is welcomed, not so much out of pity for the baby itself as out of fear that it may be ominous. The mother of such a child is also looked upon with suspicion as the original source of ill luck. It is difficult to tell how often such babies are born: I was told of only one instance and, apart from a blind boy, there were no Pandits in Utrassu-Umanagri who suffered from a serious physical handicap. Also, it should be stated here, I did not even hear any rumours of infanticide.

Killing of any kind, whether of children or adults, of one's own self (*ātmahatyā*) or of others (*manuṣyahatyā*), is totally disapproved of in Pandit culture.[10] It is argued that since no individual is really responsible for his own or another's birth—this being the result of *karma* or of divine blessing—he has no moral right to end his own life or kill others. Suicide is a secretive act of self-punishment, giving expression to a sense of frustration, guilt or dishonour. But, the Pandits maintain, suicide transfers the individual's sense of dishonour to the family and may, therefore, never be regarded as an act of self-sacrifice, which must be oriented towards others.

Killing another Pandit is a heinous sin, for it involves taking the life of a Brahman (*brahmahatyā*) which is equivalent to the killing of a cow (*gauhatyā*) in the scales of evil. There is an allotted life-span for each individual (calculable from the horoscope) and the end will come at the appointed time and in a

[10] Though a distinction would be made between dying by fasting or by some violent means, suicide is clearly condemned. This attitude is not shared by all other Brahman and non-Brahman communities. Thus, there is the tradition of *prāyopaveśan*, or fasting to death, in Maharashtra, and the most recent example of this which attracted national attention was the passing away in 1982 of Vinoba Bhave, after he had decided to abstain from all nourishment and medication following a heart attack. He was 88. The practice of fasting to death is, of course, positively affirmed among Jaina laymen (see Jaini 1979: 181). The Jaina influence among many Hindu communities, particularly in western India, is well known.

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manner that may or may not appear just but always has its hidden justification. To try to interfere with this process is to incur sin of a magnitude which would wash away the merit of all the good deeds of a lifetime. There was no known case of suicide or homicide among the Pandits of Utrassu-Umanagri, but I was given details of two cases of suicide by poisoning from elsewhere. My informants did, however, maintain that should an unmarried girl or widow become pregnant she may commit suicide or may be poisoned by her parents. But even in such circumstances the moral wrongdoing of the girl concerned would perhaps be less heinous than the sinful act of her suicide or of killing her.

To conclude this description of types of death, I should mention the death of a holy man, an adept in *yoga*, a renouncer, or one whom the Pandits call an *ātmajñānī*, that is, a person who has achieved a realization of his true nature as inseparable from the Supreme Spirit (*Brahman*). There are not many people of this kind to be found in Kashmir, but I was given accounts of some such deaths by several informants. In fact, such a person is not said to have died but attained *mukti* (release from the physical body) or *samādhi*, the state of non-dualistic union with the *Brahman*, in which the passage of time (*kāla*) loses all meaning and death (Kala) holds no fears. Besides, such a person does not join the category of manes and his post-mortuary rituals are different from those of ordinary householders.

The entry of a person into *samādhi* is a very solemn occasion, for he is considered to have transcended birth and death, and calls for the paying of homage rather than the expression of personal grief, which is nevertheless experienced by those who were closely associated with the deceased. 'They grieve', an informant told me, 'because they fail to understand their guru's teaching, though they may have served him well. The true disciple will not grieve, for life and death are of no significance compared to the craving of the individual soul to achieve union with the *Brahman*.' A Kashmiri hymn says:

> I have wandered through the grooves of conception,
> Experienced childhood, youth and old age repeatedly;
> In many garbs have I played the actor (clown):
> Take me now unto yourself and free me from the
> bondage of duality.

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The refrain of the hymn is the exhortation: 'End your isolation, O lonely one (*kevala*) through union with the unique (*kaivalya*).'

Having characterized deaths as good, bad or anomic, as expected, untimely or welcome, it is of some interest to note here that the Pandits also entertain the notion of what may be called the 'averted' death, that is a death that may have occurred but did not. The most common example is of people who recover from a very critical illness after hope of survival has been given up. The non-occurrence of death in such cases is attributed to the notion that the allotted life-span had not yet been completed. Also, divine grace (*anugraha*) is invariably mentioned as the saviour of human beings in all situations of distress and danger.

A person's death may be anticipated on the basis of astrological calculation when he is reckoned to be under the influence of a conjunction of *graha* indicative of a 'second birth' (*dvi-janama yoga*). The danger to life is judged to be acute but the hope of survival (a second birth, as it were) is also entertained. Rituals of various kinds are performed to avert death, the most notable of these being *tulābhār*, that is, the weighing of the body against grain and giving away the grain to a priest or some other person willing to receive it. The body of the threatened person is thus symbolically discarded and replaced through an act of transfer or exchange.

A third example of averted death is rather rare and involves cases where a person is believed to have actually died and come back to life. I met one such person, a man in his sixties, who told me of his 'death' following an illness. He found himself in a state of dreaming (*svapna avasthā*) and taken away by the messengers of death, who appeared to him as two beautiful women, to the abode of the dead (*yamaloka*). There they were told by some 'functionary', after he had consulted a 'red-covered register', that they had got the wrong man. He soon awoke and found his family members wailing over his 'death'. His death had finally been averted, he said, because his time to 'go' had not yet arrived. Such incidents are referred to as cases of 'mistaken identity' (*nāv badlī*, 'change of name').

I may mention one more and a different type of case in

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illustration of the notion of averted death. The first wife of Sudama, one of the old men of Utrassu-Umanagri, had borne him eleven children but they had all died in infancy. She too had then died. Sudama married again (at the age of forty-one) and his second wife began her motherhood by losing her first-born child. A few years later she gave birth to a second child, a boy, who was sixteen years old in 1957, and who had been appropriately named Lassa ('may you live!'). He had overcome what Sudama considered his own bad luck, the result of the wrong doings of his previous life or lives. The fact that his second wife bore him no more children, though she was only twenty-three years old at the time of Lassa's birth, was seen by Sudama as evidence of his bad luck. He told me that the survival of Lassa after the death of twelve children was the result of the blessings of the many saintly men whom he and his wife had visited and, ultimately, of divine grace. Lassa too might well have died (or not been born at all) but his death had been averted.

The foregoing discussion of Pandit ideas about death and dying, though presented here piecemeal as a taxonomy, is derived from their discourse on these important themes, and this discourse springs from a unified consciousness. It also guides behavioural responses to death. I will now describe some of these responses.

THE DAY OF DEATH AND AFTER

Whatever the specific circumstances of the death of an adult (that is, a ritually intiated person rather than a person of a certain age), certain actions have to be performed following it which throw further light on the Pandit attitude to dying. The last moments of a Pandit's life are accompanied as long as possible by a reading of the Bhagavad Gita, particularly the verses (in chapter II) describing the imperishability of the soul. If time and other circumstances allow, the dying person may make the gift of a cow (*gopradāna*) to a priest: the decision to do so may not be his or her own, but that of the family. This absolves one of all the moral lapses that may have occurred during one's lifetime. In place of a cow an image of the animal cut out in gold, silver, or copper (obtained in ad-

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vance, perhaps by the person himself) may be given away. If water from the river Ganga is available (in one's own home or with some other family in the village), a few drops are poured into the mouth of the dying person. If Ganga water is not available, water in which a *sālagrāma* (the black stone representation of Vishnu) has been washed may be used. The purpose of such administration of holy water is to relieve the dying person of moral imperfections and to cleanse his or her body of physical impurities.

As soon as death occurs, the event which is essentially domestic, and in that sense private and indoor, is made public through loud weeping and wailing by women and children. Men may shed tears but they are expected not to wail. Weeping by women occurs in other domestic situations also, but the stylized wailing associated with death is very distinctive and announces a death to the neighbourhood. Intense activity is thus generated: neighbours (kith and kin) rush in, messengers rush out to carry the news to all concerned and to perform other chores, the family priest arrives (or some other priest who may substitute for him in his absence), and preparations for the last life-cycle ritual begin. In short, it is a situation of much emotional stress, much movement and much talk. Wailing includes talk addressed to the dead person, to the survivors, or to oneself, recalling events, expressing grief and perhaps helplessness, and so on. The visitors who assemble offer consolation and try to control the mourners who tear their clothes and hair and slap and scratch their faces. They also make arrangements for the cremation and the feeding of the family, for no food will be cooked for three to twelve days by the first of kin of the deceased. Not only are the close kin in mourning, they are also in a state of pollution and food cooked by them would be unacceptable to more distant kin and relatives who are present in the house or arrive there. The latter suffer from pollution of a shorter duration or none at all.

Soon the rituals begin, marked by the priests' recitations in Sanskrit. The body is removed from amidst the mourners for ritual bathing and other rites. I will not go into the details of these rites but only mention their special character. Cremation is called the 'ritual of burning' (*dāhasaṁskāra*) and is the culmination of the 'last ritual' (*antim saṁskāra*). As such, it marks

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the closure of the series of rituals concerning the human body, which begin with the rite for conception, and mark the step-by-step process of maturation. One's moral maturation is thus complete only when the body is cremated: in fact, cremation offers the opportunity for release from transmigration if one has reached a state of perfection—a most rare happening. The cremation, like all fire offerings, is intended to carry upwards (to the gods) that which is entrusted to Agni, the fire god. However, all post-cremation rites are of a distinctive character, being *pitṛkriyā* (rites for ancestors) and not *devakriyā* (rites for gods).[11]

After cremation, the disembodied dead person remains in the transitional condition of *preta* (ghost) for eleven days, during which time various rites are performed and food offerings made to sustain the *preta* as also placate it, for it is dangerous. The rituals on the eleventh day signal the entry or transformation of the *preta* into the category of *pitṛ* (manes). Thereafter, offerings of food (*śrāddha*) are normally made to them biannually—on the death anniversary and during the 'fortnight of manes' (*kāmbarpacha*) in autumn—and of water (*tarpaṇa*) every morning as an act of piety (*śraddhā*). 'As we do for our ancestors so will our sons and grandsons do for us': this was said to me repeatedly, stressing the continuity of the lineage and, I might add, producing a meaningful symbolic universe comprising the *sapiṇḍa* (see Dumont 1983).

[11] I should here mention my inability at present to state explicitly the Pandit position in respect of the assertion made by a number of scholars in recent years that cremation is a sacrificial act (see, for example, Das 1982; Parry 1981 and 1982). I have never heard any Pandit refer to cremation by any word other than *dāhasaṁskāra* and the words used for fire sacrifice (*havan*) or animal sacrifice (*balī*) are not used. Nor have I heard the dead body referred to as *āhuti*, that which is offered in a fire sacrifice. But I have not had the opportunity to check all this thoroughly. Parry introduces a further complexity in the situation by maintaining that 'the householder sacrifices himself on his funeral pyre in order that he may be reborn' (1982: 74). I am quite sure that the Pandits consider the son of the deceased parent as the 'performer' who earns merit by performing the last rites. They quote the various *smṛtis* and Puranas on this point. Moreover, the prime concern in the proper performance of mortuary rites is to ensure the safe passage of the *preta* (disembodied spirit) into the category of *pitṛ* (manes). The manes are related to their descendants in a reciprocal relationship of dependence: without receiving food offerings they go to hell, but then their erring descendants also are accursed.

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The post-cremation situation is complex for at least two reasons. Firstly, not all who die are given the status of manes: for example a young man who dies before becoming a parent is not comparable to a married man survived by sons. Also, there is quite some ambiguity regarding what happens after the disembodied *preta* becomes the *pitṛ*. It would seem that in some symbolic sense, as an 'image' (*ākarā*), the *pitṛ* remains in the 'land' of the manes but is at the same time reincarnated here on the earth. Thus, in the relationship between the living and the dead, the notions of *pitṛ* (ancestor) and *punarjanma* (rebirth) negate the notion of death as a terminal event. It is an event of critical importance in the worldly life of an individual but of no consequence for his 'inner self' or soul (*ātmā*). A good life vouched by a good death does, however, take one a step further on the very long journey to freedom from the chain of birth–death–rebirth. To be worthy of grace (*anugraha*) would seem to be what the Pandits hope for in this quest for *mukti*. One of the most commonly recited Sanskrit prayers of the Pandits (which appears to be a *mélange* drawn from various sources) says: 'Born again, to die again, and then be conceived again . . . fearful of terrifying hells, I tremble with fear, O lord of the lowly, take me across unto Yourself'.[12]

Death is, then, made bearable in Pandit culture by its being treated as an opportunity for the individual soul to realize union with 'that' from which it has got separated—the *kaivalya-kevala* reunion of the Kashmiri didactic song I quoted earlier, in both of which one hears reverberations of the Upanishads. The Pandits' preoccupation with this reunion is but an echo of the Kaivalya Upanishad's repeated exhortation, '*kaivalyam padam aśnute, kaivalyam padam aśnute*', that is, 'he merges with the unique, with the unique he merges'. Similarly, the Katha Upanishad says: 'If one fails to attain Brahman before one's body falls away, one must then don a body again to return to the world of created things' (II.3.4); but 'the knowing self is never born and it never dies' (I.2.18).

It is not only through rituals and metaphysics that the Pandits

[12] *Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi garbhanivāsam/*
ghoram hara mama narakaripo keśava kalmaṣa bhāram/
māmanukampaya dinamanātham kuru bhavasāgara pāram.

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attempt to cope with death but also through mythology. After a death has occurred, particularly of a parent, a learned priest is invited to read to the bereaved from the Garuda Purana, or some other suitable text, with a view to dilating upon the ephemeral nature of human life and thereby helping them to overcome their grief. The telling of such stories (*kathā*) in a formal manner is a mediating link between the abnormal speech forms that are triggered, as it were, by death, such as wailing (*vilāpa*) or withdrawal into silence (*dam-phuti*), and normal everyday speech forms.

Besides the strength derived from Puranic tales, an awareness of myths of various kinds, which is not unusual in a traditional Brahman community, also helps place life and death in a proper perspective. Let me illustrate this point. For the Pandits the family is indistinguishable from the house, which, as stated earlier, is not treated as a mere dwelling of economic value but also carries considerable emotional and cultural significance (see Madan 1965: 45–55). The same word *gara* (or *ghara*) is used to refer to both the family and the house and the latter is seen as symbolizing the cosmo-moral order. When the foundations of a new house are laid, rituals are performed to invoke the blessings of gods (notably Ganesha, the god who bestows auspiciousness and success on human actions) and to appease malevolent spirits. Among the benevolent deities invoked are the *kśetrapāla*, the guardians of the domain (space). When the construction of the house is completed, two small clay (or brass) pots are ceremonially installed in the kitchen which is a demarcated sacred space of critical importance in the Pandit home. These pots are brought in from the earlier house in which the family lived and are significantly called the *sanivāri*, 'the eternal pots', that is, the pots symbolizing perpetuity. Then the fire is lit ceremonially for the first time in the kitchen hearth and the primeval fire-god Agni is thus installed in the house. If the family have had any sacred icons (such as a *liṅgam*, a *śalagrāma*, or a *śriyantra* symbolizing Shiva, Vishnu and Devi respectively) these too are ritually installed in the central room above the ground floor which is called the *ṭhokur-kuṭh*, 'the gods' room'. Besides the hearth, every traditional house has a fire altar for the performance of fire rituals (*homa*). Each house is also believed to have its own protective deity

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called the *gharadevatā* (the god of the house) who is identified with the Vedic god Vastoshpati at the time of the early winter feast in his honour.

Vastoshpati is the god of the dwelling place (*vāstu*) and he is also the protector of the sacred or moral order, for he is the enforcer of divine law (*vratapā*). It is thus through the connection with this god that a Pandit house becomes the microcosm of the universe and the members of the family represent humanity. It may be recalled here that the Rig Veda (I.71) tells us that Vastoshpati himself arose from the seed spilled by the Divine Father when his sexual intercourse with his daughter Ushas (Dawn) was interrupted by Agni, who shot an arrow at him for committing violence against the undifferentiated whole, the 'uncreated'. But Agni also warmed (cooked) the spilled seed into progeny, that is, into differentiated creation.

Agni is thus a central figure in this myth of genesis as told to me by some informants. And Agni finds a place in the Pandit hearth where food (a handful of rice) is offered to him before cooking starts in the morning. He thus sustains life. Ritual offerings (*homa*) are made to Agni periodically (some families do this fortnightly, *pakśāga*) and he serves as the mediator between the family and the gods. The important life-cycle rituals of initiation (*mekhalā*) and marriage (*nethar*) are also performed in front of Agni, as is the biannual rite of feeding the manes (*śrāddha*). Finally, it is to Agni that the dead body of a Pandit is entrusted, though this is done at a cremation site (*śmaśān*) and not at home. The home where daily rituals, births, initiations, marriages and rituals for ancestors take place is conceptually the very opposite of the cremation site for the burning of dead bodies, but these places and these critical events of family life are united through Agni, who emerges as a mediator between gods and men, the cosmos and earthly dwelling, this world (*ihaloka*) and the next (*paraloka*).

The manner in which the Pandits conceptualize death and dying is discernible in the post-mortuary rituals they perform, in their metaphysical traditions, and in the mythology which is always present in their minds as memory and is recalled in the didactic stories (*kathā*) which are told and listened to from time to time. What appears to be critical to their attitude is that death is not associated with finitude, though the inevitabi-

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lity of death is acknowledged and, in fact, greatly emphasized. Moreover, death is not seen as a threat to or a sacrilege against the social order. The cultural ideology of the Pandits stresses the importance of placing death in its proper context, which is provided first by the imperishability of the soul and then by the perishable nature of the body (*śarīra*) which is referred to as *kṣṇabhaṅgur*, 'that which may dissolve any moment'. While the learned and the wise may conclude from such ideas that grieving over death is the result of ignorance and wordly attachments (*māyājāl*), common people do nevertheless grieve and express sorrow over death, and often see in it the need for certain social rearrangements, as, for example, when a young, childless widow returns to live in her natal home from where she had been 'carried away' (*vivāha*) as a bride.

In the foregoing discussion I have focused on the Pandits' cognitive orientation to dying and death and tried to show how it provides the cultural setting for an interpretation of what people do and what they think and perhaps feel in the event of a death. In other words, it is because death causes both a rent in the social fabric (as Hertz would have it) and a personal bereavement that the importance of the cognitive stance that the wise do not sorrow over death should be stressed. And the wise are the exemplars of proper conduct. Pandit eschatology does not say that death is an insignificant event but that it is important enough for one to prepare for it; yet it is only an event in a chain to be followed by other events (births and deaths), just as it has been preceded by similar events. In the words of an informant, 'Only the unwise try to find the last bead in a rosary or the starting point on the potter's wheel.'

The roots of Pandit eschatology lie in ancient Brahmanical traditions. I have already indicated the Upanishadic reverberations in it, as also its explicit reliance upon Puranic mythology. The epics, particularly the Ramacharitmanas of Tulsidasa, with its deep devotional fervour, are also cited to expound the style and content of the good life. It is important to note, however, that what we are dealing with here is in fact an oral tradition, for though almost all Pandit men in rural Kashmir are literate, only a small minority among them are proficient in Sanskrit or know the texts well. Many of my informants are

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hardly aware of the precise textual sources of the elements of their beliefs. Their cultural tradition in respect of the goals of life and their eschatology, however, belong beyond any doubt to the family of Brahmanical traditions, and it is this, among other things, that I have tried to bring out in this chapter.

The Pandit world-view reflects the classical Indian doctrine of *karma* tempered by the later devotional Shaivism and Vaishnavism. Such a synthesis of early and medieval religious traditions is, of course, found in the lives of Hindus everywhere. 'One is born, and one has to die', said one of my informants, 'but one must not forget one's proper conduct (*dharma-karma*) in between, nor forget God either, for one should know that though trivial in themselves, these events "enclose" a great opportunity to improve one's moral fibre and move forward slowly towards ultimate release from the grip of life and death.' In sum, it is not birth or death, or the living and the dead, or gods and human beings, that matter, but the efforts to establish the proper relations between them. And that is what *bhaṭṭil*, the Pandit way of life, is all about.

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APPENDIX

A NOTE ON THE EPIGRAPHS

Throughout the book certain quotations have been used as epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter and of the Introduction and the Epilogue. The sources of the quotations are given below.

INTRODUCTION. The quotation from Kalidasa (fifth century A.D.) is from the prologue to Act I of *Abhijnanshakuntala*. The translation is by Barbara Stoler Miller (1984: 89). The context is, of course, the staging of a play, but should also apply to the interpretation of cultures.

The admonition by Horace (65–8 B.C.) on the limitations of human knowledge is the well-known *nec scire fas est omnia* (*Odes IV*, iv. 22).

The line from T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) occurs in *East Coker*.

CHAPTER 1. Krishna Razdan (1850–1925), a Kashmiri Brahman, is remembered for his devotional poems which are sung to this day. The translation is by Nilla Cram Cook (1958: 137).

The celebration of the 'bonds of delight' is by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) from song 73 of *Gitanjali* (see Tagore 1955: 34).

CHAPTER 2. This statement by a learned Kashmiri Pandit was made in answer to a question of mine regarding the significance of auspiciousness. It is worth pointing out that he managed to weave ingeniously into his statement the meaning of the *Gāyatrī mantra*, one of the holiest incantations of the Hindus, found in the Rig, Sama and Yajur Vedas, hearing which is considered both auspicious and purifying. Every Hindu who goes through the rites of ritual initiation into the status of a 'twice-born' *dvija* hears this mantra for the first time on that occasion and is expected to recite it every morning, preferably facing the sun, thereafter.

CHAPTER 3. The translation from a poem by Bhartrihari (fifth century A.D.) is by Barbara Stoler Miller (1978: 91).

The quotation from the Bhagavad Gita is from verse 45 of Chapter II.

CHAPTER 4. The quotation from the Katha Upanishad is from verse 1, section 2, of Chapter 1 in Radhakrishnan's translation (see Radhakrishnan 1953: 607).

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The extract from J. Krishnamurti (1895–1986) has been taken from Vas (1973: 208).

CHAPTER 5. The quotation from the Katha Upanishad is from verse 29, section 2, of Chapter 1 in Radhakrishnan's translation (1953: 607).

The second quotation is from the 'sayings' (*vākya*) of Lal Ded, a fourteenth-century Shaivite mystic poetess of Kashmir. The translation is by Kaul (1973: 123).

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